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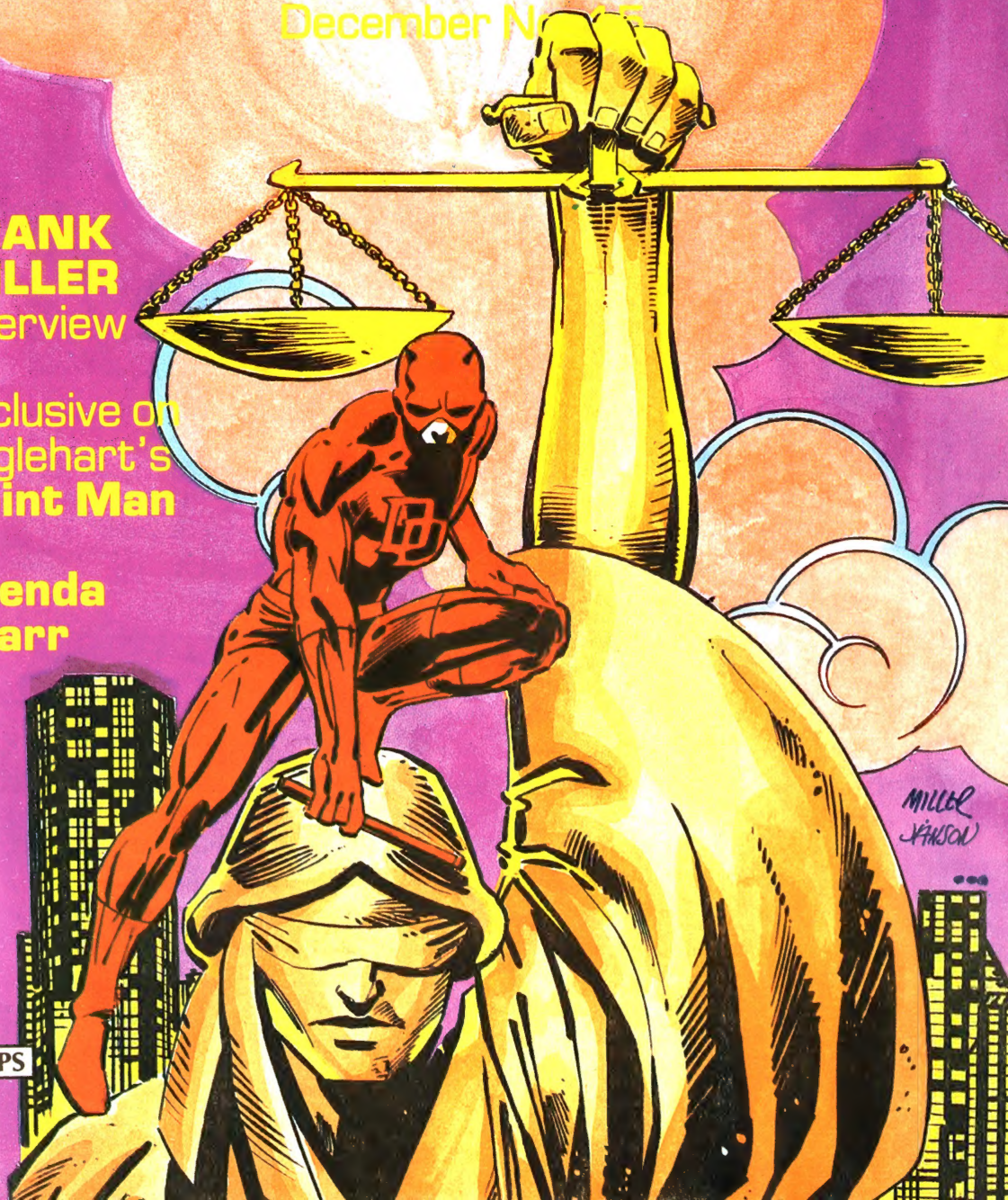

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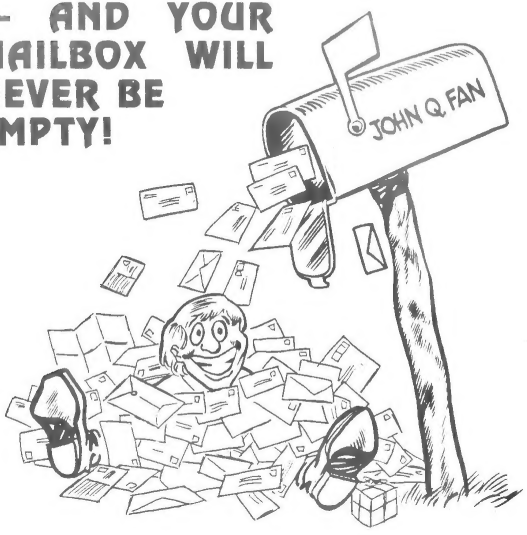

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DECEMBER NO. 14

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THE DEFINITIVE BATMAN

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Cover by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson
Colored by Richard Howell

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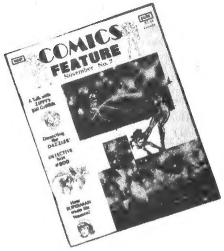

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OPENING NOTES

IN PRAISE OF DIVERSITY

by Carol Kalish

COMICS FEATURE is a general interest magazine which is designed to cover the myriad facets of comics collecting. What's a general interest magazine? Well, it's a publication which tries to include articles which offer something of interest to everybody. In **CF**'s case that means that we regularly offer interviews with both old, established professionals and the latest fan favorite writers and artists, articles on both current comics and "lost" or forgotten series and comics houses, overviews of comic strip series, animation houses, and comic-related movies, and collecting tips as regards investment, care and storage of perishable paper product, and collectability of original art. Now some of our readers have wondered why we "waste" all that space on unimportant stuff like animation and comic strips, topics which they feel have little connection to mainstream comic ***book*** collecting. While we admit that some of these columns might leave some of our readers completely cold, we'll make the argument that these very same articles are of particular interest to ***some*** of our readership. These readers are fans who either are already interested in such fields as animation and strip collecting or who are just expanding their comics interest beyond the boundaries of book collecting and are unfamiliar as to what else is available in the field. Comics enthusiasts owe it to themselves to investigate some of the more esoteric areas of comics collecting.

While **CF** will try and encourage such experimentation with new interests through special columns and articles that focus on areas of comics collecting that extend beyond just comic books, the absolute best way of learning about some new, hitherto overlooked area of comics collecting is to take a look at the multitude of really specialized small press publications and/or APAs (Amateur Press Associations). If you think you have a nascent interest in ***THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES***, then rush out and pick up a copy of ***THE LEGION OUTPOST***, a small press publication that is a great introduction to the subset of fandom that is that series' devoted followers. Are you intrigued by ***THE X-MEN***? Then you should investigate joining one of the apas which are devoted to discussing that title. Think you might be getting into comic strips? Then why don't you pick up ***STRIP NEWS*** or ***CARTOONAGIO***? Just as there are infinite areas of interest which fall under the rubric "comics collecting," so, too, are there countless fanzines that cater to those specialized interests.

Unlike the general interest magazines like **CF**, these fanzines rarely are typeset or exhibit high production values. What they do have that we can't provide is a boundless enthusiasm for narrow areas of interest that deserve to be explored and an incredible knowledgability about their chosen area of interest. This enthusiasm backed by solid familiarity with the topics being discussed is often just what's needed to nurse a passing interest into a life-long obsession. You owe it to yourselves to investigate these special interest magazines to see if you have any hidden obsessions waiting to br developed.

Even more important, you owe it to fandom in general to experiment occasionally with these special interest publications. Without new readers many of these publications will eventually die. With the each magazine's disappearance, fandom is treated to one less unique approach to comics commentary. We're all left that much poorer.

So next time you pick up ***COMICS FEATURE*** or one of the other general interest comics commentary magazines, spend a few pennies picking up a specialized fanzine as well. ***FEATURE*** can give you a fairly complete overview of what's going on in the comics field, but it's the small press fanzines which can provide new twists to your comics hobby.●

RETURN OF THE FEATURE CURSE DEPARTMENT.

Remember last issue when we told you how we'd never again have any problem with lateness? Well, we didn't know it at the time, but circumstances were in the making that would make that very issue in which that reassuring bit of flak appeared-*late!* No, we weren't responsible. Actually, we couldn't have done anything about it at that time even if we knew about it. We're only editors, after all. ***This*** issue's reassuring bit of flak will be less reassuring: We will do everything in our power to get ***COMICS FEATURE*** TO YOU ON TIME ***EVERY*** MONTH. The material beyond our control is the only thing we really have to worry about (and we ***do***).

COVER CAPERS

In case any of you out there assumed that The Red Skull was trying to get the drop on Captain America (on the cover of ***COMICS FEATURE #10***, naturally) by masquerading as a Micronaut, you're wrong. Well, you may ask, why then was the Nazi menace approximately one-half as tall as the good Captain, yet inarguably placed in front of him? Well you may ask, indeed. Our instructions to our printer would have produced a cover on which The Skull was indeed standing behind Captain America, and standing upright, at that. Alas, that is not what finally saw print. We had several choice words with our printer about it, and they had the same with their out-of-house color prep staff. Stricter measures have been adopted (including preparing all the photographic work here in Cambridge), and, hopefully, nothing of the sort should ever happen again. (That sounds familiar, doesn't it?)

Also, the mistake was not enough to fully undermine your enjoyment of John Byrne's renditions of Cap and The Skull against the flag. As Jenette Kahn so sagely says, there are only so many mistakes (or opportunities for mistakes) that can be made in magazine production—and we're closing in on the home stretch. Soon we'll be perfect.

HEADLINES

DICK GIORDANO PROMOTED TO MANAGING EDITOR AT DC

Jenette Kahn of DC Comics announced that Dick Giordano, the editor of DC's line of "***Batman***" titles and ***ARAK, SON OF THUNDER***, has been promoted. Effective immediately, Giordano becomes Managing Editor of DC's 31 comic book titles. He is now responsible for overseeing the creative staff and the contents of the comics, emphasizing the development of new writers and artists.

Giordano will be reporting to Joe Orlando, who is directly responsible for both the editorial and production staffs as Vice President-Editorial Director. He will also be working with Editorial Coordinator Karen Berger in coordinating the assignments of DC's writers, artists, and inkers. Tomsyn O'Flynn has been promoted from proofreader to assist Giordano and Berger.

Giordano will continue as editor of the "***Batman***" books and ***ARAK*** and as supervisor of the artists' internship program he created upon his return to DC. Under this program, new artists receive script assignments, and work on them under the sole supervision of Giordano. He evaluates the work, requesting revisions until the completed job is up to DC standards, at which point it is accepted for publication.

Also, since coming to DC, Giordano has worked closely with most of the creators who have come from Marvel, including most recently Roy Thomas and Gene Colan. Because of Giordano's very good reputation as an editor, many creators are anxious to work with him. DC has therefore given him responsibility to find new talent as the company cautiously expands.

Dick Giordano, editor of DC Comics' "***Batman***" line and of ***ARAK, SON OF THUNDER***, has been promoted to Managing Editor of DC. His comics career spans some twenty years at many different companies.

Giordano's new position is a logical development of his long and distinguished comics career. He is perhaps best-known in his former Managing Editor position for Charlton Comics during the mid-1960s. It was at that time that Giordano revived the super-hero genre at Charlton, which featured such cult favorites as ***THE BLUE BEETLE*** and ***CAPTAIN ATOM***. As a Charlton editor, Giordano also helped begin the careers of such now-established comics creators as Steve Skeates and Jim Aparo.

In the late 1960s, Giordano was hired by newly-appointed Editorial Director Carmine Infantino. DC's sales had been flagging, and Giordano was one of many artists hired as editors to give the visuals more emphasis (Orlando was another). Giordano brought with him many of his Charlton co-workers, including Skeates, Aparo, Pat Boyette, Denny O'Neil, and Steve Ditko. For his mystery titles (including the now-defunct ***THE WITCHING HOUR***), Giordano recruited outsiders to DC Comics such as Al Williamson and Jeff Jones. Although his books—which also included ***BEWARE THE CREEPER*** and ***TEEN TITANS***—were acclaimed by fandom, their lives were cut short as Giordano left editing and returned to art.

Giordano has long been associated with an effort to bring new and talented people into the industry. He has taught at the Joe Kubert School, instructing young artists in the fundamentals of drawing and inking comics. He was Neal Adams' partner in creating Continuity Associates, which has attracted considerable notice for its stable of "up-and-coming" talent. Giordano continues to run his own company, Dik Art, as well, specializing mostly in advertising work.

In his own right, Giordano also has a substantial reputation in the comics field. His award-winning inking on such series as ***GREEN LANTERN/ GREEN ARROW*** and ***BATMAN*** is a focus of much fan interest, as is his pencilling for such series as "***The Human Target.***" Several young inkers, such as Terry Austin, Klaus Janson, and Steve Mitchell, have cited Giordano as a major influence on their inking style and skill, and the effects of his work can be seen on many others' throughout the field.

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ASTRAL COMICS TO GALAXIA; new title planned

Astral Comics, the publisher of ***GALAXIA*** magazine, announced that it has changed its corporate name to Galaxia Enterprises. Richard Buckler, the publisher and editor of the new publishing firm, reported that the first issue of ***GALAXIA***, which features super-hero or space-fantasy stories containing Christian themes, sold very well. Indeed, the success of their first magazine seems to have inspired the company to publish a second title: ***SCIENCE FICTION ODYSSEY***. This title, too, will feature super-hero stories, including ***"Starwolf," "Tempest," "Mr. Midnight,"*** and ***"Gabriel Force." SCIENCE FICTION ODYSSEY*** will feature work by several of ***GALAXIA***'s contributors, including Buckler himself, Butch Guice, Willie Blyberg, Bob Smith, and Sam Delarosa. Current plans call for the first issue to contain 52 pages. It will retail for $2.50 and will appear quarterly.

DESTROYER DUCK INKED

This is an example of the finished inks of the upcoming ***DESTROYER DUCK*** comic. As reported last issue, this comic is a special one-issue benefit designed to help Steve Gerber in his lawsuit against Marvel Comics.

©1981 Steve Gerber & Jack Kirby

DC DIGEST & MINI-SERIES LINE-UP

There is talk of a ***DOOM PATROL*** digest in the near future, to accomodate the new interest in the cult classic series as a result of its dangling plot threads being disposed of in ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS***.

The schedule for the upcoming DC Digest comics is as follows:

THE BEST OF DC:
#23 "The Year's Best Comics Stories" (edited by Julius Schwartz)

This will include the DC staff's own choices for the company's best stories published in the past year. Among those which will probably appear:

"Sivana's Nobel" (WORLD'S FINEST, "Shazam" series)
"To Kill a Legend" by Alan Brennert and Dick Giordano, from ***DETECTIVE #500.***
"Piper at the Gates of Hell" from ***HOUSE OF MYSTERY.***
"The Dying Day of Lois and Lane," from ***SUPERMAN.***
The third installment of the ***TALES OF THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS*** mini-series.
TEEN TITANS #8.
unspecified (as of ***FEATURE'S*** press time) stories of Jonah Hex and Sgt. Rock, each from their own magazines.
"Whatever Happened to the Crimson Avenger?" from ***DC PRESENTS.***

#24 THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES (edited by Mike Barr).
#25 SUPERMAN (edited by Julius Schwartz).
#26 BRAVE AND BOLD (edited by Andrew Helfer).
#27 SUPERMAN VS. LUTHOR (edited by Schwartz).

DC SPECIAL DIGEST
#20 GOTHIC ROMANCE (edited by Laurie Sutton).
#21 OUR ARMY AT WAR (edited by Dave Manak).
#22 SECRET ORIGINS OF SUPER-HEROES, edited by E. Nelson Bridwell.
#23 GREEN ARROW (edited by Len Wein).
#24 HOUSE OF MYSTERY (edited by Karen Berger).

The DC mini-series will feature more aspects of the ***"Superman"*** legend in the near future. Discusions are underway to produce a four-part ***"Bizarro"*** mini-series, featuring the legendary "imperfect duplicates" of Superman and his friends. Another mini-series will feature ***SUPERMAN: THE IN-BETWEEN YEARS***, expanding on the back-up series appearing in ***SUPERMAN***. The present plan is to devote one issue to each of Clark Kent's college years, and thus produce four issues.

COME, DEAR! WE NOT BE HAPPY ON EARTH WHERE PEOPLE FEAR US! WE TAKE YOU TO LIVE BY OURSELVES ON OTHER WORLD IN FARAWAY SOLAR SYSTEM.
BIZARRO LOIS IS ONLY COMPOSED OF LIFELESS MATTER, SO SHE WON'T BE ALIVE IN SPACE! WHEW! THAT GETS RID OF BIZARRO FOREVER! VERY CLEVER, LOIS!
©1981 DC Comics Inc.

MODESTY BLAISE IMPORTS STOPPED BY SYNDICATE; LACK OF SALES CITED

MODESTY BLAISE, the British adventure comic strip, will not be seen by American readers after September 4. The Los Angeles Times Syndicate, which distributes the popular series in the United States, is dropping the comic. No other American distributor has indicated plans to pick it up following the L.A. Times Syndicate's cancellation. Current reports are that ***MODESTY BLAISE*** was appearing in only 12 U.S. papers at the time the syndicate made its decision to drop the title from its sales list.

MODESTY BLAISE is considered by many comic strip fans to be one of the all-time classic continuity strips, ranking with ***TERRY AND THE PIRATES, LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE,*** and ***ON STAGE*** as an example of comic strip storytelling at its best. For all its critical accolades, however, and its undeniable popularity in foreign papers, the strip has always been a difficult one for a domestic market to syndicate.

As it appears in Britain, ***MODESTY BLAISE*** contains scenes of nudity and strong language which have to be altered by its American distributor to make the strip more acceptable for domestic consumption. The series also featured much longer stories than the American syndicates recommended for continuity series. Since newspapers (and their comics-page editors) are wary of strips which demand lengthy audience commitment on the grounds that it dissuades new readers from reading a potentially convoluted story already well in progress, syndicate salesmen faced stiff resistance towards selling the strip to new accounts.

Although it was difficult to sell the series to new papers, it seems that ***MODESTY***'s departure from American syndication will distress many of the readers of the 12 papers which did carry it. Most of these papers had, in the past, experimented with dropping the series, only to be forced to reinstate the popular comic due to overwhelming reader outrage.

Pictured here is the cover to the new ***MARVEL COMICS INDEX #9B***, featuring information about The X-Men (both the original team and the new group). The index will offer a complete index to both teams' appearances, as well as those of Black Goliath, The Champions, and the super-heroic Ghost Rider. It should be released soon, now that the cover by Brent Anderson and Terry Austin has been completed.

character ©1981 Marvel Comics Group

JACK ADLER RETIRES FROM DC

Jack Adler, DC's Vice-President-Production Director, has requested early retirement. He will leave the company as of September 1, 1981. Adler plans to continue to work for DC on a consulting basis on a variety of different projects which require his vast expertise in printing and production techniques.

Adler's request was motivated by his desire to have more free time which he could devote to his interests in photography and reproduction. Adler's earlier experiments led him to the design of a pre-GAF stereoscopic slide viewer and an automatic diaphragm for photographic use.

Adler joined DC in 1950, after more than a decade's experience in the engraving and printing end of the field. His printing expertise (described by Adler as "new ways to do old things") has long been one of DC's most important assets. Adler has worked on everything from 3-D comics to dropping color from the pages of previously-printed color comic books in order to reprint classic stories for which the original art or printers' proofs no longer exist.

Bob Rozakis will continue as Production Manager, supervising the day-to-day running of the department and its staff. At this time no replacement has beeen announced for Adler and it is likely that his responsibilities will merely be divided and reassigned to either Rozakis or DC's Editorial Director, Joe Orlando.

DC

The previously-announced ***PHANTOM ZONE*** mini-series has been expanded to span four issues instead of the originally-scheduled three. ***PHANTOM ZONE #1*** will still appear on the January 1982 schedule, and Steve Gerber and Gene Colan remain the creative team. Writer Gerber will use the four issues to explore Superman's many friends and foes who have inhabited the Phantom Zone throughout the years. The mini-series will also take us into previously-unknown and unexplored aspects of the Zone as well.

During the Summer convention season, DC representatives Roger Slifer and Paul Kupperberg toured with various examples of upcoming DC material, including Colan's ***PHANTOM ZONE*** work, which met with an enthusiastic response.

Mike Kaluta has done the cover for ***HOUSE OF MYSTERY***'s 300th issue.

The new art team on the recently-reassigned ***LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES*** title is Keith Giffen and Bruce Patterson. They will begin their regular stint with issue #286 of the super-teens' title, after a two-issue guest stint by Pat Broderick. Paul Levitz remains the series' scripter.

Marty Pasko supplied the script for a 27-page lead story in ***SUPERBOY #25***, which is drawn by Kurt Schaffenberger and Dave Hunt.

Upcoming team-ups in ***THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD*** include: (#182), Batman and Robin of Earth-Two, with a guest-star appearance by Starman, written by Alan Brennert; Hawkman, written by Dan Mishkin and Gary Cohn, appears in #183; #184 features Batman and the Riddler, written by Don Kraar; and #185 will feature Batman and Adam Strange, written by Mike W. Barr. Jim Aparo will be handling the art chores on all issues.

DC COMICS PRESENTS team-ups include: (#40) Superman and Metamorpho, by Gerry Conway, Irv Novick, and Frank McLaughlin; (#41) Superman and the Joker, by Pasko and Garcia-Lopez; (#42) Superman and Power Girl, scripted by Marv Wolfman; and (#43) Superman and the Golden Age Superman, also scripted by Wolfman.

Bruce Jones takes over as regular scripter on the ***"I, Vampire"*** feature in ***HOUSE OF MYSTERY*** as of issue #299. Tom Sutton remains the strip's artist.

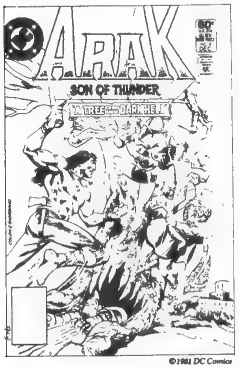
GHOSTS #107 features a special three-part story chronicling the history of a royal crown, written by Bob Kanigher. ***"Oh, Murderous Crown"*** is drawn by Howard Bender and Larry Mahlstedt; ***"Burn, Clown, Burn,"*** drawn by Rodin Rodriquez; and ***"The Ape Who Would Be King,"*** by Adrian Gonzales. The cover is by Joe Kubert.

WORLD'S FINEST has been handed to Mike Barr to edit. Previous editor Len Wein let go of the now-monthly dollar comic due to scheduling pressures. Wein is assuming the editorial duties on the forthcoming ***FIRESTORM*** and ***SWAMP THING*** titles.

To compensate for his assumption of ***WORLD'S FINEST***, Barr has relinquished ***WEIRD WAR TALES*** to Julius Schwartz and E. Nelson Bridwell.

Dan Mishkin and Gary Cohn have created a new back feature called ***"Tejano Ranger,"*** for ***JONAH HEX***. It is the story of a Mexican/Indian half-breed Texas Ranger. It will begin in ***HEX #53*** and will be drawn by Tom Yeates.

Paul Kupperberg has taken over the writing of the ***"Zatanna"*** strip in ***WORLD'S FINEST***. The artist, as of the second installment, remains Dan Spiegle.



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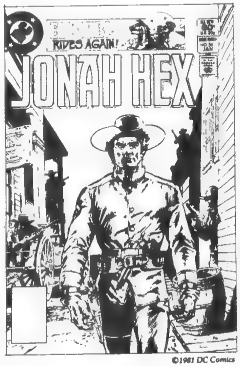

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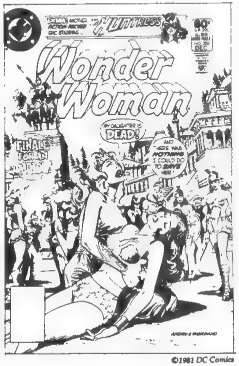

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Marv Wolfman and Gene Colan will be doing a "novelistic" mystery-horror comic for DC, which will be a regular series debuting next year.

Don Heck will be pencilling and inking the ***"Superman/Batman"*** feature in ***WORLD'S FINEST COMICS.***

The ***"Doctor Fate"*** back-up strip, by Martin Pasko, Keith Giffen, and Larry Mahlstedt, begins in ***THE FLASH #306.*** The opening splash page, pictured here, features the logo lettering designed for the character by Walt Simonson during hiw brief tenure on the Doctor's adventures (one issue of ***FIRST ISSUE SPECIAL***).

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Adrian Gonzales has assumed art chores on ***ALL-STAR SQUADRON*** from Rich Buckler. Gonzales' issues are scheduled to begin with #6. When the Buckler covers run out (with #7), Joe Kubert will take over as cover artist.

Pat Broderick will guest-pencil ***THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES #283*** over a Paul Levitz story. Issue #284 is a guest-pencil job by Howard Bender in a Roy Thomas tale that features Wildfire.

MARVEL

Tom Palmer will both ink and color the Stan Lee/John Byrne ***SILVER SURFER*** one-shot comic, which will be on sale by December.

Frank Miller has accepted the assignment to draw the ***WOLVERINE*** mini-series. It is presently scheduled to appear in January.

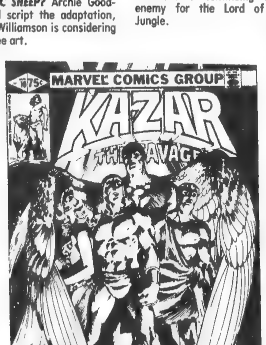
Marvel will probably be doing a comics adaptation of the forthcoming science fiction film ***BLADE RUNNER***, which will be produced by The Ladd Company (***OUTLAND***), be directed by Ridley Scott (***ALIEN***) and star Harrison Ford (***STAR WARS, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK***). The film, to be released in 1982, is based on Philip K. Dick's ***DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?*** Archie Goodwin will script the adaptation, and Al Williamson is considering doing the art.

MICRONAUTS #38, the first issue to be available solely through direct sales outlets and subscriptions, will contain two stories, both by Bill Mantlo. The first, with art by John Garcia and Danny Bulanadi, recounts a meeting between Commander Rann, when he was a child, and Baron Karza. The second presents the first meeting between Bug and Acroyear.

Despite previous reports, Bill Mantlo will remain ***THE MICRONAUTS'*** regular writer. Gil Kane will become its regular penciller, while continuing on ***CONAN*** as well.

Doug Moench is the new writer of ***KING CONAN*** beginning with issue #9.

The present ***"Road to Hell"*** story in ***KA-ZAR*** is designed to introduce a continuing arch-enemy for the Lord of the Jungle.



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Don McGregor and Craig Russell are collaborating on a new **"Killraven"** adventure to be printed in full color in ***EPIC ILLUSTRATED***.

The Viper and The Silver Samurai return in ***SPIDER-WOMAN #42***.

Having recently tried to make The Dazzler his herald, Galactus next enlists Rom in ***ROM #27***.

Spider-Man and Nick Fury guest star in ***CAPTAIN AMERICA #266*** in a story by Dave Kraft and Mike Zeck.

Bruce Jones becomes the new regular writer on ***CONAN*** with issue #131.

Cyclops' father, Corsair, returns with his Starjammers in ***X-MEN # 134***.

The Beast and Wonder Man will turn up in ***DEFENDERS #104***.

El Aguila encounters Power Man and Iron Fist again in issue #78 of their magazine.

The Unicorn returns in ***IRON MAN #155***.

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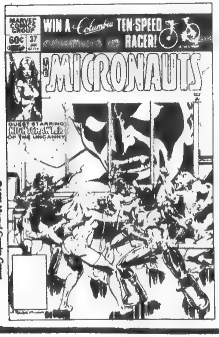
The Thing teams up with Alpha Flight in ***MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #84***.

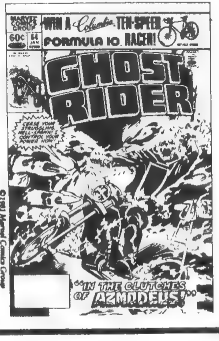
X-MEN #152, **"The Hellfire Gambit,"** will be pencilled by Bob McLeod and inked by Josef Rubinstein.

BIZARRE ADVENTURES #29 is devoted to horror stories, including the adaptation of Stephen King's **"The Lawn Mower Man"** by King and Walt Simonson, **"Mirror, Mirror"** by Bruce Jones and John Buscema, and **"Greenberg the Vampire"** by J. M. DeMatteis and Steve Leialoha.

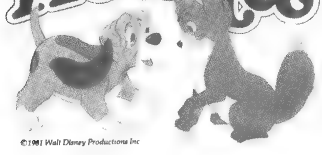
Howard The Duck will no longer appear in ***CRAZY*** due to adverse reader reaction. Issue #81 will parody ***SUPERMAN II*** and #82 will do ***RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK***. Issue #82 is said to have a cover painting by John Byrne that depicts The New X-Men "in possibly the most humiliating situation of their careers."

Plans for doing Marvel adaptations of the ***ROCKY*** movies have been shelved.





the Fox and the Hound



©1981 Walt Disney Productions Inc

by Paul Dini

From the opening moments of Walt Disney Production's ***THE FOX AND THE HOUND***, the audience senses it is about to see a film different in tone than any of that studio's previous animated features. There is no musical fan-fare, no up-beat swell of song to accompany the title and credits, which is, in itself, a change of pace for a Disney cartoon. Only the soft chirping of birds is heard as the camera slowly pans in on a foggy mountain forest. Right away, ***FOX*** establishes itself as a quiet, somber film, more along the lines of ***BAMBI***, than the Disney studio's more recent funny animal cartoons, ***ROBIN HOOD*** and ***THE RESCUERS***. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to call ***THE FOX AND THE HOUND*** a funny animal picture at all, because although it has its share of light moments and laughs, the audience is shown from the beginning that they have entered a world (albeit animated) not far removed from their own, where death is real, and tragedy strikes suddenly. Comparisons with ***BAMBI*** will be inevitable, especially with the young fox's mother's death, and the climactic hunt scene near the film's end. However, these similarities are only cosmetic, for ***THE FOX AND THE HOUND*** sets its own pace and style, and emerges as one of the loveliest pictures to come out of Disney in many years.

The story deals with the unlikely friendship that develops between an orphaned fox cub and a hound pup, and how, as they grow older, friendship becomes eclipsed by natural instinct. It could have easily been an old ***TRUE-LIFE ADVENTURE***, and one almost expects to hear Rex Allen's mellow narration drowning over the soundtrack. But ***FOX*** is classic Disney animation through and through, even better than the studio's other post-Walt offerings, because they seem to remember that in addition to humor, warmth, and flawless draftsmanship, it's also good to toss in a moment or two of honest terror and suspense.

It is on such a note of suspense that the film begins. A mother fox appears, running for her life as the sounds of a baying hound and gunshots draw closer. Trying to draw the hunters away, she leaves her small baby beside a farm fence, then dashes off, to be seen no more. This sad scene, however, has been witnessed by Big Mama (voice by Pearl Bailey) a wise and earthy owl who, with the help of her bird friends Dinky and Boomer (Dick Bakalyan and Paul Winchell, respectively) , brings the orphan cub to the attention of Widow Tweed (Jeanette Nolan) the farm's kindly owner. Instantly smitten, the widow adopts Tod, as she names the cub, as her pet and companion.

Meanwhile, down the road, hunter Amos Slade (Jack Albertson) has returned home with a new fledgling hunting dog, a baggy-eyed pup named Copper. Eventually, the fox and the hound meet, and become best pals. But the hunter doesn't approve of young Copper's choice of playmates and takes the pup with him into the mountains for the Winter. There Copper grows to maturity, and when he returns in the Spring, acts aloof and distant to his also full-grown fox friend. "Those days are over,"Copper says of their youthful friendship. "I'm a huntin' dog now." The hunter, spotting Tod on his property, gives chase, and during the ensuing hunt, old Chief (Slade's other dog) is badly wounded. Thinking that Tod deliberately led Chief into a trap, Copper snarls vengeance against his former friend, and vows to hunt down Tod if it's the last thing he does.

Knowing that Tod is no longer safe on her farm, the widow turns the fox loose in a far-away game preserve. But Slade—still anxious for revenge—breaks into the park with Copper, and Tod and his new mate, Vixey (Sandy Duncan), are forced to flee from the vindictive pair. During the hunt, Slade accidentally flushes out a gigantic bear, which attacks Copper, and prompts Tod to come to the rescue of his old friend. Copper, all thoughts of vengeance now gone, stands bravely between the wounded fox and his master's gun. Slade, realizing the hunt is over, calls his dog and heads for home. Looking back over their shoulders, Tod and Copper give each other a sad little half-smile before drawing away into their own respective worlds forever.

THE FOX AND THE HOUND is a film of many emotions, conveyed by the power and subtlety of the animators, and the skill and sensitivity of the actors. In recent years, the Disney animators have relied excessively on the use of celebrity voices to carry a picture. In some cases, like Eva Gabor's Miss Bianca in ***THE RESCUERS***, or Phil Harris as Baloo in ***JUNGLE BOOK***, the results were far from satisfactory because their characters were designed with their celebrity images in mind. This made the screen character little more than a thinly-disguised extension of the star doing its voice, and if you don't happen to like Eva Gabor or Phil Harris, sorry, but you probably won't enjoy the characters they speak for, either. Happily, none of those problems are apparent in ***THE FOX AND THE HOUND***. Although there are many big-name stars doing the lead voices, it seems that in each case, an

Big Mama (Pearl Bailey) finds the orphaned Tod.

engaging character was developed, and an actor was found who most closely suited what the artists had in mind. As Tod grown up, Mickey Rooney is perfect, bringing to the part every bit of energy and wit a fox should have in his voice. Kurt Russell, a long-time veteran of Disney live comedies (***SUPERDAD***, ***HOW YOU SEE HIM, HOW YOU DON'T***) gets his best Disney role to date as the earnest and eager-to-please hound dog, Copper. His older counterpart, Chief, as voiced by Pat Buttram, is appropriately gruff and surly, but still lets a little effection for his young charge slip through, adding just the right tone of humility to what could have been a dull, or (considering Buttram's previous outing as a hound dog in ***THE ARISTOCATS***) repetitive role.

The others are all fine, especially Sandy Duncan's pert and snappish Vixey, Paul Winchell's dizzy, stuttering Boomer, and Jack Albertson is the irascible hunter, Amos Slade. Slade is the closest the film comes to an actual villain, but even at his worst, Albertson makes him a hard man to hate completely. Any man who howls along songs ("A Huntin' Man") with his dogs can't be all bad, can he?

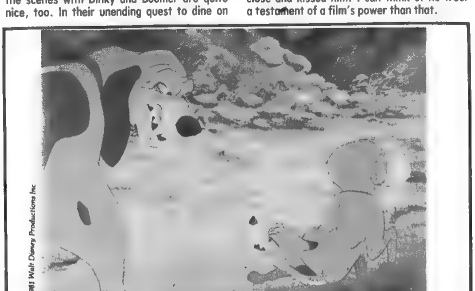
And as Big Mama, Pearl Bailey gives her part (a nice twist of the wise old owl theme) a kind of rough elegance, especially when she cautions the young fox in song on the ways of hunters and their dogs ("Lack of Education").

As winning as the voice talent in ***FOX*** is, it is matched frame by frame by the near-flawless draftsmanship done by the mostly-new team of Disney animators. They show their dexterity in a thousand different ways, from a gently shimmering spider's web seen near the film's beginning, to the picture's big show-piece, the fight scene with the bear. Not since Monstro the Whale has an animated creature moved with more danger and menace! The first time the bear appears, it literally erupts from a thicket lashing out savagely at both the hunter and dog—the cover of ***ARGOSY*** magazine brought to life, and guaranteed bad dreams for anyone in the audience under ten. Later, the creature slowly closes on the fox, who lies torn and helpless at a waterfall's edge. Seen advancing through the mist as a dark, roaring form, distinguishable only by its glowing red eyes and slavering jaws, the bear is one of the studio's most chilling visual images.

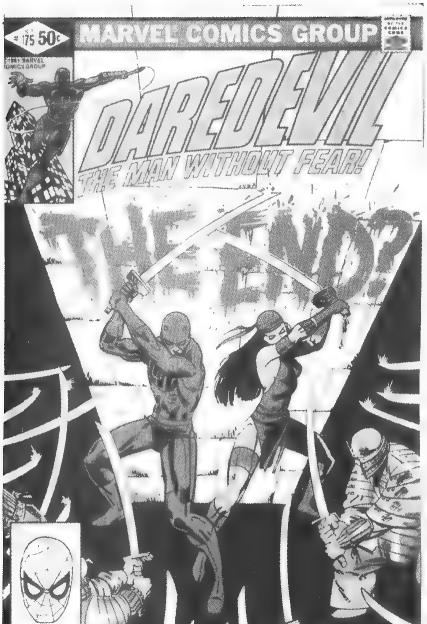
Though the bear fight is a masterful example of complex action skillfully rendered, the new animators strut their stuff with the same apparent ease throughout the whole picture. The chase scene where young Tod is loose in Slade's yard is well-paced and funny, with Tod scurrying away from Chief, who is dragging his make-shift barrel dog house behind him. And the scenes with Dinky and Boomer are quite nice, too. In their unending quest to dine on Squeeks, the juicy caterpillar, the sparrow and woodpecker come across as feathered versions of Leo Garcey and Huntz Hall. Their scheming and bumbling makes for a funny sub-plot which comes to a clever resolution at the film's end.

My only real problem with the film from a technical point of view was that in several places, mostly close-ups, the picture looked fuzzy and unfocused, with unusually heavy outlines around a given character. It was as if the image of a character was shot out of focus while being animated, and nobody bothered to go back and correct the mistakes. In a film of this level, such slip-ups are very unprofessional, and can't help but remind the audience, however briefly, that they are only watching a series of colored drawings.

But all in all, it's hard to find much else to dislike about ***THE FOX AND THE HOUND***. At first glance, it seems to be just the sort of film an audience might expect from Disney, but its simplicity and uncluttered storyline are deceptive. In these days of big escapist pictures with big effects, only the Disney people know how to double back on their own tracks and produce a quiet little movie which envokes the same feelings of wonder and joyfulness. Anyway, the real magic of a Disney cartoon is not how it is done, but in the universal emotional responses it cooxes from an audience. Every kid knows the gut-wrenching feeling at the sight of Pinocchio floating face-down in the tide-pool, or the blissful exhilaration at seeing Dumbo spraying peanuts bomber-style at his former tormentors. The ability to emotionally move an audience is no more apparent or honest in ***THE FOX AND THE HOUND*** than the scene where the desperate mother fox must leave young Tod behind. In that moment, as the vixen carefully laid the cub down in the thick grass and bolted away, I saw a small child in my row reach out and silently take his mother's arm as she gently drew him close and kissed him. I can think of no truer a testament of a film's power than that.



The former friends meet as enemies in a tense scene.



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AT LAST, MORTIMER!
ONE MINUTE FROM NOW... NO WILL WISH HE'D STAYED IN BOUNCE!

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KALISH: Frank, you've mentioned that you were feeding off the early Marvels. Was that how you got sucked into the industry, through an addiction to comic books?

MILLER: That's the root of it, I'm sure. When I was a little kid, I didn't do much of anything but read comic books. But I stopped reading them when I entered high school—the usual time when kids stop reading comic books. But I did continue to write and draw my own, at home.

KALISH: What type? Were they super-hero comics?

MILLER: They were mostly crime stories. That was because when I stopped reading comic books I started reading detective novels, and became fascinated with the genre. But when I was finishing up high school, I got interested in comics again and I started pursuing doing it for a living. I met Neal [Adams], and through conversations with him—through showing him drawings I did and receiving his criticism—I worked up a portfolio that I could show around. So, yeah—the comics brought me to the comics.

KALISH: Had you intended to pursue an art career for yourself during high school? Was that a professional aim?

MILLER: I didn't study art as much as I studied writing—my English teacher wanted me to become a writer—but I became determined to pursue an art career, and the comics form was on my mind the whole time. I just had reached the point where I wasn't interested in the comics that were coming out. I'm not sure of the exact years, but it was a pretty bad time for comics.

HOWELL: Late 1960s?

MILLER: Probably, yeah. I missed the whole new breed of comics artists—Wrightson, Kaluta, missed all of them. I was aware of Barry Smith's stuff, but I missed a lot of the young Turks that came in around then, and I've only recently seen their work. So I've been interested in the form since I was eight years old, and it was mainly just not ***enjoying*** the content that stopped me from reading them.

HOWELL: And you didn't start getting actively back into reading comics until you decided on pursuing it as a career?

MILLER: Right. The first job I got from Marvel—which hasn't seen print—was a back-up involving a character I'd never heard of. I was out of touch, and once I started working for Marvel—the third

Richard Howell and Carol Kalish of *COMICS FEATURE* interviewed Frank Miller at his apartment in early Summer, 1981. The interview was transcribed by Kurt Busiek, edited by Howell, and further edited and approved by Frank Miller. *FEATURE* would like to thank Frank Miller for his efforts in preparing this interview transcript, and further thanks to him and to Klaus Janson for this issue's cover.

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANK MILLER

comics company I worked for—I had to read the comics to find out who the characters were and what they were doing.

HOWELL: What were the other two companies?

MILLER: I worked for Gold Key first, then for DC.

HOWELL: Really? What did you do for Gold Key?

MILLER: A couple of ***TWILIGHT ZONE*** comics. It was very strange work (laughter), mainly because I was doing the inking on them too, 'way before I should have tried to. I've only recently been working on my inking, and it's obvious to me that it's going to be a while before I get to be as good as I'd like to be. But yeah, I did full art jobs for them, and they weren't all ***TWILIGHT ZONE***, but I can't remember what the other ones were.

HOWELL: RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT?

MILLER: Something like that. Nothing super-hero. At DC Paul Levitz gave me some ***WEIRD WAR TALES*** to draw. I also did a one-page love story which has never seen print—thank goodness—and let's see, what else? Again, I was staying away from super-heroes.

HOWELL: Consciously?

MILLER: I think so. I know that when I first had a super-hero to draw, I was scared stiff.

HOWELL: Was that the Marvel job?

MILLER: Yeah.

HOWELL: Who was the character?

MILLER: Doc Samson.

HOWELL: Oh, him. Pretty minor character.

MILLER: Yeah, yeah—one with some charm, though (laughter). The super-hero stuff was a whole new problem for me, because I hadn't been reading them for so long, and I hadn't been trying to draw super-heroes since I was a little kid. So I approached it in terms of learning anatomy, drawing musclemen doing various things, and gained a lot of anatomy knowledge through that. Later I was able to tap into whatever memory I had of the super-hero stuff, of the more lyrical style of fighting and leaping, and like that. But when I first tackled super-heroes it was really frightening to me, 'cause I didn't understand what made them tick, and I thought that if you just drew realistically it would work. It doesn't (laughter).

HOWELL: At that point, did you remember the old stuff that you had been reading and...

MILLER: Well, I remembered it, but I was having such a rough time working—I mean, I'm talking about spending a week on a page—it took me forever to draw anything. So I was taking in as much literal, realistic information as I could, and only paying a bit of attention to the super-hero comics. And at one point—it was a ***SPIDER-MAN*** job—all of a sudden I kicked in and remembered all the comics I'd read as a child, and found a way to apply them directly to the work. Even though if you asked me at the time I ***would*** have remembered such-and-such a story from ***SPIDER-MAN #30***, I hadn't been able to apply it to my work yet. Then, I consciously studied various ways that artists drew comic book fights, and...

HOWELL: And characters.

MILLER: Mm-hm. Well, fights were the biggest problem, though, because they had to be approached strictly on comic book terms. A ***SPIDER-MAN*** fight has nothing to do with a boxing match. Super-hero fights are peculiar to comics because they don't resemble real fights; they don't resemble much of anything real.

HOWELL: How would you describe the differences between the comic book convention of drawing people and drawing fights, and the realistic drawing that you were into before?

MILLER: Saying comic book fights aren't realistic isn't saying anything bad about them. It's just saying that in order to make full use of what comic books can do, you have to stylize the figures and actions. An example of almost the ***perfect*** fight artist in comics would to my mind be Gil Kane. While he incorporates his incredible knowledge of anatomy into his drawing, he exaggerated every blow and every stretch of muscles—to the point where you get something that explodes across the page.

HOWELL: He works a lot with different angles, and different shots.

MILLER: Mm. And sometimes reality just doesn't work on the page. By reality I'm talking photography, I think, because reality isn't just usual. I remember getting punched in the mouth, and I remember what it felt like, and I'm sure that if someone had taken a picture, that it wouldn't have looked very dramatic. But I know what it felt like, and to translate that feeling onto a page, you have to stylize and exaggerate the gesture of the figure that's punching and what effect a punch has on the other body.

HOWELL: So the feeling is more important than the look?

MILLER: Absolutely. The visual has to represent the feeling.

HOWELL: Does that hold true for other aspects of comics art besides fights?

MILLER: Oh, I think so, yeah. The characters are symbols, each built around a rather simple theme. The girlfriends have to be beautiful, because they're sex objects, and the heroes are...

HOWELL: Hero images.

MILLER: It gives the reader something immediately identifiable.

HOWELL: As long as the reader is male, we can toss in.

MILLER: Absolutely, I... hm, that's a real good point (laughter). By saying that the girlfriends are sex objects doesn't mean that that's the whole role of women characters in comics—even though up to now it largely has been. The Elektra character that I worked on isn't a girlfriend, and she—if she's a sex object, she's a very strange one.

HOWELL: That won't stop a lot of the readers (laughter from everyone).

MILLER: Working up a female character who's assertive and heroic—even though Elektra doesn't necessarily qualify as heroic...

HOWELL: Not yet, at least, from what I've seen.

MILLER: But in working up a female character that is assertive, you're working against a lot of visual conventions that are designed to present women as passive. That's the basic problem they've had with Wonder Woman for years. They've got a character who could just be incredible, if they stopped drawing her like a Playboy bunny. Paid attention to what the women bodybuilders are doing. Have you ever seen any pictures of Lisa Lyon?

KALISH: Yes.

MILLER: She's an amazing woman. I've been using photos of her for some of the reference for Elektra.

KALISH: She combines muscularity with femininity. I think that the women body builders are on to a whole new concept for femininity,

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"Saying comic book fights aren't realistic isn't saying anything bad about them."

and it's something that comic book artists would do well to pay attention to.

HOWELL: Certainly there's an amount of disadvantage that you have to face with these women athletes when the convention for showing strength in comics for the male characters is showing rippling muscles, and huge biceps and pectorals, and in that case showing power and femininity in comic conventions are mutually exclusive.

MILLER: It depends on your definition of femininity.

HOWELL: It's not mine, it's just the one I've seen most often in comics. I've heard like the different guidelines in class that John Buscema and John Romita talked about, and working within those guidelines, it isn't really possible to show...

KALISH: ...muscles at all on a female figure.

HOWELL and ***MILLER:*** Yeah.

MILLER: I disagree with the guidelines.

HOWELL: John Buscema told me that kneecaps were out, too. (More uproar and giggles)

MILLER: Well, I—it's been a trial and error thing with me. I've found that an attractive muscular woman can be drawn. The only reason that people haven't done it is that people haven't done it. The basic forms of the muscles are beautiful, whether they're on a male or a female. That doesn't mean that a muscular woman will look like a man. The reason I mention Lisa Lyon is that some women bodybuilders do have a very masculine look to them, but Lisa Lyon's look remains very feminine. I'm almost afraid to use that word, because I don't know what definition it's conjuring in your mind.

HOWELL: It's probably going to have different ones depending on whoever hears it.

MILLER: Well, she's a beautiful woman. She's also a very muscular woman. The kind of femininity I'm describing is not at all the meek, passive kind that may be what people think when they hear "femininity." There's a photograph of her holding a barbell on her shoulders, and Arnold Schwartzenegger on the barbell (Howell laughs). But all the while she's a very attractive woman. And I think that adds to her attractiveness, that she's so well-defined.

HOWELL: I was wondering how we got off on this.

MILLER: We were talking about super-hero fighting.

HOWELL: That's right, and...

KALISH: ...the problems with women (mumble).

HOWELL: Right, right. As long as the reader is male, then...

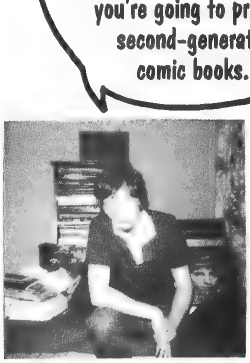
MILLER: The main reason that there hasn't been a strong super-heroine—by strong, I mean one having her own book, and gaining popularity—is because neither the writers nor the artists have really been able to handle the concept, or the delivery in a way that's dramatic enough, or—dramatic isn't the right word—deliver it in a way that's attractive and dramatic. There were countless times in comics that the female heroes would go out and conquer armies, but all they really wanted was their man. That's just Karen Page all over again, with super-powers (laughter).

KALISH: Forcibly dragging this interview back (laughter) within the ball park: We've heard various references to the influences that you have cited—or that elements that you have studied—in order to develop your story-telling abilities. What are the influences that you would cite, both as a writer and as an artist?

MILLER: Within comics.

KALISH: Or outside of comics.

MILLER: Within comics, I've studied Gil Kane's work quite a bit in the beginning. I think there was more of his influence in the work I did a year ago than the work I'm doing now. I'm continually studying work I run across. For storytelling, I've studied Bernie Krigstein's work, and Will Eisner's, Harvey Kurtzman's—beyond that, I'm continually picking up jobs by various people. If I run into an Alex Toth job somewhere, I'll study it, of course. In the writing: again, some of the people I just mentioned, Eisner and Kurtzman, and some of the people I'm currently working with, particularly Denny O'Neil. Hmm... and going outside of comics, I mentioned cop shows, a lot of detective novels. Whatever I'm reading at the time has an effect. Movies—I see lots of movies.



KALISH: Is that to examine the actual storytelling, the pacing and the narrative structure, or is that just in part also to get a new input for the visual elements?

MILLER: If a movie is good, I go see it several times. I saw ***ALTERED STATES*** four times. The first time, I saw it strictly as a member of the audience; I didn't allow myself to start thinking about why the director or the writer did what they did. The second time I was a bit more analytical. And if I'm still intrigued, I'll see it several more times, and it will come in on separate levels. Sometimes I'll get material for a story, other times, I'll see how a scene is presented. In ***ALTERED STATES***, the main thing I was studying the fourth time out was the economy of the screenplay. Did you see the movie?

KALISH: No.

MILLER: In the first forty minutes, there's enough material for a two-hour movie. They don't give you an extra shred of information.

And that's the way an artist has to work. You have to absorb what you can from the world around you. Comic books are not enough. The current comic book line may hold some interesting things, but it's certainly not everything that's being done in entertainment, and someone who wants to work in any entertainment field should be aware of what's going on in the other ones. Working with Denny has been very good, because he will mention lines that I could follow, things that I could read that he's aware of. I think a lot of the martial arts stuff I've been getting into with ***DAREDEVIL*** is indirectly attributable to him. I'll mention an idea that's rather unfocused, and he'll suggest looking at Zen Buddhism or something that relates to my idea, and I'll go off and study it.

So there's a lot of research, a lot of reading and seeing—television as well. ***HILL STREET BLUES***—I've got to cite ***HILL STREET BLUES!*** That show is teaching me more about comics than any comic book I've ever seen.

KALISH: I think out of our last four interviews, you're the third who has cited that program.

MILLER: Really? (laughter) That's great. In that show they do continuity. They have, I believe, fourteen lead characters, and the characters all operate as they relate to the Hill Street Station. There are storylines that develop over four or five episodes, but each episode still has a complete story. But the continuity makes you come back each week. You want to find out what happened to the characters. It's really an amazing show. I think it's revolutionary for series television, because it has characters developing throughout it, couples getting together and breaking up, and so on. Characters die—you get to know a character for five episodes, and then he'll get his throat slit. So there's that element of fear—that even the regulars can die.

HOWELL: How would you compare it to the standard soap-opera format as far as that goes? We're not talking quality, just format.

MILLER: They are obviously using soap opera-style continuity, but each episode has within it a complete story. I think that distinguishes it.

KALISH: So you view all aspects of the entertainment media, as...

HOWELL: Fair game?

KALISH: Gist for your creativity?

MILLER: Yeah, it's all fair game—it has to be, really. If you operate in a vacuum, if you do comic books and only read comic books, you're going to produce second-generation comic books.

HOWELL: At least.

KALISH: Or possibly third, depending on whom you base yourself on.

MILLER: Exactly, yes.

KALISH: Which of the entertainment media do you think is closest to comics?

MILLER: Television. Series comic book work is part of a continuity.

"Spider-Man's a great character to draw. All my reservations about the character are in how he talks...he never stops whining."

It's produced under similar circumstances as TV—as far as time you have in which to do it. It's not very subtle, generally, and you have to keep it simple. You have a hero in every story, the hero gets into an adventure, wins—it's largely what happens on adventure TV shows.

HOWELL: Standard format?

MILLER: Exactly. I just did a ***SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL*** that had Spider-Man, The Punisher, and Dr. Octopus... what a bunch of fun guys (laughter). Denny wrote it. We worked very loose on the plot, like we did with last year's annual, and I was just making up bits as I went along. At one point, Octopus just calls up Mayor Koch, to tell him that in the morning five million New Yorkers are going to be dead. "What do you want?" says Koch. "Nothing," says Octopus, "I was just establishing my credentials. Next time I'm going to threaten." (laughter) It's like a **"Bugs Bunny"** cartoon. That's what a lot of the fighting is, too.

HOWELL: Good clean fun?

MILLER: I was doing a scene in the ***DAILY BUGLE*** press room in which Spider-Man's fighting Dr. Octopus. Jameson is tossed onto the presses—Spider-Man catches him, and has to do a log rolling job on the presses, holding Jameson and arguing with him at the same time. I was tempted at one point to throw in a Spider-Man version of the Bugs Bunny/Elmer Fudd routine and have Spider-Man kiss Jameson, y'know (laughter) and JJJ say, "Why, you—you—you—"

HOWELL: Wascally Spider-Man.

MILLER: Yeah. He and Bugs Bunny have a lot in common (laughter) when both are in good form.

HOWELL: When they reprise **"Siegfried,"** we'll start to worry.

MILLER: Spider-Man's a great character to draw. All my reservations about the character are in how he talks, 'cause his visual is still very confident, and very strong—it's just that he never stops whining.

HOWELL: Do you think that the writer, or in some cases the dialogue person—can have that great an effect on how the character is perceived by the readers?

MILLER: I think Stan did. Had Spider-Man had an indifferent scripting job, I think it would have been a much less exceptional series.

HOWELL: There's a certain argument for that in that a lot of the strips Ditko was working on seemed to have, on the surface, just as much going for them as the **"Spider-Man"** series did.

MILLER: THE CREEPER?

HOWELL: THE CREEPER. THE BLUE BEETLE.

MILLER: Really, yeah.

HOWELL: But they didn't catch on. They didn't catch on to the same extent, certainly. They're not here today.

MILLER: In some ways ***THE HAWK AND THE DOVE*** had more. It had some terrific stuff right at the beginning. The tension—the conflict—between the brothers was really good. Also, The Dove flew in the face of what comic books are about.

HOWELL: How so?

MILLER: The Dove was, y'know...

HOWELL: ...impossible...

MILLER: ...if he was right, then there shouldn't be any comic books (laughter). 'Cause all these heroes are wrong.

HOWELL: Oh but no, in Japan, comics are considerably more violent than they are here, and it seems to exorcise people's aggressions somehow.

MILLER: Drawing them certainly does. I'd be nastier if I didn't have Daredevil punch out people every month.

HOWELL: It's like watching football games, getting out the aggressions of the office week.

MILLER: Yeah, yeah. Or kicking the dog when you get home (laughter).

HOWELL: That's a bit less harmless.

MILLER: Conversely, I've noticed that the better my life goes, the less I really feel the need for there to be big fights in what I do, and the more fun I try to put into the product.

HOWELL: You mentioned ***THE HAWK AND THE DOVE*** before, and that reminded me of something Jo Duffy told us: that it's one of the axioms drifting around the Marvel office that Stan thinks any super-hero whose concept is too involved to be exploined in one sentence has much less of a chance of being successful.

MILLER: That's something I've heard Stan say, so I can vouch for that, and I think there's a good deal of truth to it; that in comics you're dealing with characters who wear their identities on their chests—and if a child picks up an issue of ***THE FANTASTIC FOUR***, and sees that one of the characters bursts into flame, it's easy to remember which one The Human Torch is.

HOWELL: I hope.

MILLER: And it's a matter of economy. It's a matter of identifying the characters as quickly as possible.

HOWELL: Would you include the characters' motivations in that?

MILLER: Generally, I think. On ***DAREDEVIL***, I'm working with a character that I can describe in a sentence...

HOWELL: Go ahead.

MILLER: Oh, geez.

HOWELL: (chuckle) Dare you.

KALISH: Called your bluff.

MILLER: "A blind lawyer whose remaining senses are heightened."

HOWELL: Okay.

MILLER: It's an essential part of the Daredevil character that he's a lawyer—a defense lawyer, particularly. It's something that I had a hard time dealing with when I first worked on the character, because my first reaction was, "He should be a prosecutor, he hunts down criminals," but it became clear to me at one point—I think Shooter pointed it out to me—that Murdock's concern—and Daredevil's concern—is with the ***victim*** of crime, not with the criminal. And someone falsely charged with a crime is a victim of the crime, as well.

HOWELL: I can recall that surfacing frequently in Shooter's own issues of **DAREDEVIL**, but it doesn't seem to have been too consistent throughout the series.

MILLER: Right.

HOWELL: When you got the character completely for your own—what was it, five issues ago, something like that—did you go through the past issues and figure out what you wanted to keep, and what you thought was inconsistent, or less attractive?

MILLER: What I tried to do was isolate the very basic stuff of the character. Then I looked over what had been done, with that concept, and figured out what should be kept and what shouldn't. There was a sub-plot or two that I dropped, and a couple that I resolved as quickly as possible.

HOWELL: I haven't even noticed the dropped ones.

MILLER: Well, I dropped the one where Matt's secretary fell in love with him.

HOWELL: Oh, that. Yeah.

MILLER: I thought that was a big mistake. A tradition (laughter).

HOWELL: In the **"Ani-Men"** issue, there was one very funny panel: Matt had been kidnapped, and there's three women, all crying sad thought balloons over Matt (laughter).

KALISH: And they were all different...

MILLER: The Karen Page think-a-like contest. (uproarious laughter). But I also found opportunities for new stories in back issues. There'd been a story with The Gladiator, where The Gladiator went crazy.

HOWELL: Oh, that one.

MILLER: Yeah. I didn't agree with that treatment of The Gladiator, but I found it to be an opportunity, because in it Matt said he was going to take the Gladiator's case. And I could have ignored it—I'm sure no one remembered the line—but I thought it would be a good opportunity to show Matt in action as a defense lawyer, and a chance to reform a villain.

KALISH: But why did you choose The Gladiator, of all of Daredevil's foes? You had someone who's one of his oldest foes, introduced in #18, who's been known to have murdered several people (I think he derailed an entire train) and was probably responsible for at least twenty or thirty people dying, and hundreds of people being maimed (because it was a long train...).

MILLER: Yeah, I remember it.

KALISH: He, I think, crashed an airplane at least once, or tried to.

MILLER: He tried to.

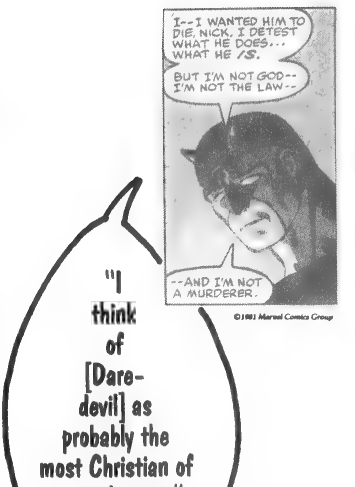
KALISH: And he's been a recurring problem. In his earlier appearances it was less that he was a maniac—someone who really was slipping in his own perceptions at time, putting himself into a gladiatorial setting rather than a real setting—but more that he was an actual criminal, who turned to crime for personal gain. Why did you choose a character whose overriding history as a character has been so negative?

MILLER: That's precisely the point. It gets into my definition of Matt Murdock as a character. I think of him as probably the most Christian of super-heroes, in that he loves his enemies, to some degree, and that The Gladiator's crimes—a series of really vicious, horrible acts—demonstrate this facet of Matt's character more dramatically. We can hate those acts without hating The Gladiator, and that if The Gladiator truly wants to reform, then Matt will do everything in his power to help him. Were I to do a story on reforming The Stilt Man, I just wouldn't have as good a story. It wouldn't be as interesting.

KALISH: Because the drama would be lacking? The contrast wouldn't be as great between the criminal and the reformed character?

MILLER: The greater the character transformation, the greater the drama. To reform a character who is many times over a murderer creates a dramatic enough situation and raises enough questions to make the story worth doing.

KALISH: It seems that you're also fascinated with the question of how much responsibility ordinary citizens have to their society. There's that very odd story with Becky (general giggles from Miller and Kalish) which we won't go into since it seems that a lot of people didn't pick up on what was going on there...


I--I WANTED HIM TO DIE, NICK. I DETEST WHAT HE DOES... WHAT HE /S.
BUT I'M NOT GOD-- I'M NOT THE LAW--
--AND I'M NOT A MURDERER.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group
"I think of [Daredevil] as probably the most Christian of super-heroes."

MILLER: I think that's safe to say.

KALISH: But part of that story was the underlying element that if Becky **had** spoken up when she should have two years prior to the action of the story, at least some of the train of events which did take place never would have happened. At the same time, though, Daredevil, through his own brutalizing experience, realized part of what it's like to be a victim; something which I don't think he's ever suffered through before. It seemed the major emphasis in that story seemed to be that the citizen had a responsibility to guard society, to warn other people, and to prevent other people from becoming victims. Now you have Matt deciding that a very, very proven evil should be let loose in society again. That seems to be a very personal decision on his part.

MILLER: Only in that he doesn't believe that this is the same man who committed those crimes. There is a line where he specifically says that the man is being charged with the Gladiator's crimes, but The Gladiator no longer exists in his mind, so they would be charging the wrong man.

It's interesting that all these issues come into play when all I really want to do is fool around with characters and play them off one another. The whole "Gladiator" thing comes straight from a stray line that Daredevil says in an issue that I didn't write. At first all I wanted to do was put Matt through the paces of actually defending a criminal, which he hasn't done for a long time.

KALISH: I think the Leap Frog case was the last time we saw him really active in court...

MATT'S WORST NIGHTMARE COMES TRUE!
MR. MCGINN, YOU'RE DARKHAWK AND FOGGY TAKING OVER MATT'S JOB!
HEH-HEH-HEH! IT'S SO MUCH FUN, BUT YOU'RE TOO SLOW!
CAN I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH?
OF MATT EVER DECIDES TO GIVE UP THE LAW, HE'LL MAKE A FINE CHRISTMAS PRESENT-LATER AM AND BLACK OKAY!
HUH? OH... I GUESS JUST PICTURE THAT!

©1983 Marvel Comics Group

"Heather's the toughest [character] of the bunch, because the cliches she represents are *so* negative..."

MILLER: Yeah... Almost any story about a lawyer is going to deal with certain difficult problems: duty to society, culpability. The question for me, then, is whether to skirt them or to confront them. Everything is material, these issues are good matter for stories. The stories aren't designed to raise the issues.

KALISH: The issues are designed to illuminate the characters...?

MILLER: They come as a consequence of the chemistry. Can I do a story in ***DAREDEVIL***, with The Punisher, which is a conflict between a vigilante versus a lawyer. The Becky story was also largely a story to make her more interesting. Like most of the supporting cast in the book, she was unfocused. So I more or less tried to focus a story around her as well. And I'm doing the same thing with the other members of the cast, trying to feature them.

HOWELL: Do you think that's almost going to be a recurring cycle—or will this featuring them in turn bring them up to the point where you no longer have to fashion issues that feature them? Once they're re-established in the reader's mind, that is.

MILLER: Once they're re-established, I'll have a good deal more freedom of how to play them. Once Becky is a consistent personality, once people have seen enough of her to care for her, then I get to exploit that. The same thing with Foggy. Throughout the series, he's been treated inconsistently. One question that has never been resolved is ***why*** he's Matt's partner.

KALISH: Yes.

MILLER: There's never been any indication that he's a good lawyer, or good at anything else. So I had to figure it out in my mind what it is that Foggy does. And in order to do that, I had to readjust my perspective on him. What I came up with, was, if you remember the origin story, there's a panel where Foggy remarks, "Gee, I gotta study all night, but you just fly through the classes!" Well, I figure as a result of all that studying, Foggy is a human encyclopedia of law. He can remember anything that happened in court anywhere in the country—ever—and Matt often can't. So without Foggy, Matt flounders a bit. He can make all the abstract points in the world, and he's very intelligent, but it's Foggy who remembers "the such-and-such decision."

HOWELL: The precedent.

MILLER: So the two need each other as a team. And that gives Foggy a bit more credibility. While he is a funny character, there is really no reason he should be a clown.

KALISH: Do you think any character should be primarily a clown?

MILLER: Some people *are* funny. Some people I have known—who are not clowns, but by being human beings—keep me laughing. And that's Foggy. I don't think he's stupid. It would make no sense for him to be stupid. He's just the sort of guy who makes the wrong jokes at parties, and is rather oblivious to what goes on around him. And if he sits in a chair, there's a good chance it will break. He can be a very appealing character.

Heather is another problem. She's got to be the most unpopular girl friend in comics. (laughs) I could write her out of the book if I want, it's my option, but I've made up my mind not to: I've really come to like the version of her I use. It's just been rather tough describing that version to a really antagonistic audience. (laughs)

KALISH: She seems to have been such a bubblehead for so long. Is she a bubblehead?

MILLER: No.

HOWELL: Did you ever hear Marv [Wolfman]'s origin of Heather as a "Challenger of the Unknown?" (Miller looks aghast). Marv reported in FOOM or somewhere that, according to him, Heather came down with a deadly *and* terminal disease at one point, and figured it was all over. Then she was cured almost miraculously, and it changed her life. It affects different people different ways: The Fantastic Four decided to devote their lives to fighting evil; the Challengers thought they were living on borrowed time anyway, so they could take lots of chances; Heather decided she wouldn't take anything seriously anymore.*

MILLER: (Laughs) That's very funny! That's got a lot of charm. I didn't hear that before, so that's not part of the material I had to work with when I put together my version of Heather. I regard her as, on one level, a spoiled brat—she's used to having whatever she wants. She appears to be very, very flighty, brainless, very childlike—because she's daddy's little girl—but I think there's some harder stuff underneath. For instance, I'm doing a story where Matt loses his radar sense, is out hunting for trouble and she's totally freaked out worried for him, because he obviously doesn't behave as well as he used to. And she decides to help him. In fact, she risks her life for him. So she's not just an airhead.

HOWELL: Except for being a more sophisticated, experienced, worldly woman, Heather sounds a lot like The Wasp in her early years—except Jan had the benefit of being tutored by somebody who was a super-hero. Matt is not interested in tutoring Heather in super-heroic ways, naturally enough.

MILLER: There's also another problem with doing a character who is female. There are certain alarms you can set off: the flighty woman who changes her mind at the drop of a hat is such a stereotype, and such a horrible one, that it makes people very angry. However, legitimate characters may be that way.

HOWELL: Doesn't deny that they really exist.

MILLER: No. You can have a male character who works out every morning for two hours, drinks beer, and watches football. And he can still be a very good character.

Yeah, Heather's the toughest one of the bunch, because the cliches she seems to represent are *so* negative, and the readers, the letters that come in...

* All efforts to track this story down before press time failed, but Howell insists that it appeared, more or less intact, in an issue of ***FOOM*** which was released during Marv Wolfman's days as writer/editor of ***DAREDEVIL***. Can anyone corroborate this?

KALISH: "Dump Heather!"

MILLER: A nice little review, and then "get rid of Heather" at the bottom. "Please shoot Heather." Stuff like that.

HOWELL: Do you feel you're going against the wishes of what the audience wants to see?

MILLER: Yes. I don't believe it's the responsibility of the artist to spoonfeed the audience what they want, because the artist is ***bringing*** something to the audience, and just as the artist can learn from his audience, the audience can learn from the artist. I could just drop Heather and come up with a character that would be much more immediately liked—at one point, I almost did. But I wanted to work on Heather a little bit more, and I think she can work, it's just going to take a while. With Becky, the problem was that nobody knew who she was. With Heather, they think they know, and they don't like her.

HOWELL: Was it your decision to remove The Black Widow after her last tenure?

MILLER: No, that was a decision made from outside the book. I believe Roger was told that Marvel was doing another series with her. For what it's worth, I didn't like her. I felt she had become a character that was so...She had become several things at once. When she was first created she had such a great conflict built into her. She was a Russian spy who fell in love with an American industrialist. Communism versus capitalism. Love vs. Duty. But I just couldn't figure out who the hell she was today. Having an affair with a god here, mooning over the old involvement with Hawkeye, she was ***this***, then went through ***that***, and now does this, this, and ***this***.

HOWELL: Well, in your own way, you're dealing with characters who have gotten to that point already, have been simplifying them, and boiling them down to what the essence of their character is. Do you think that's a natural process of these continuing series? Now and then things have to be reduced...

MILLER: Distilled.

HOWELL: Yeah, distilled to the point where the reader can once again latch onto things quickly?

MILLER: I think that's what's been happening in the field lately. A lot of that is because of Jim Shooter. I think that's one of the most positive things he's done for his company—he's made people think in terms of the basic concept of a character, and hold to it. Because comic book writers have a larger degree of freedom than say, television writers, they will develop characters and change them, often draw the characters away from their original concepts. In some cases, this can be really wonderful, like some of the stuff that Jim Starlin did.

HOWELL: CAPTAIN MARVEL and ***WARLOCK***?

MILLER: He took them far afield, but it was a fun ride. But in Marvel's interest as a company which has to keep presenting the characters to new audiences, year after year, it's better to have the characters very easily identifiable. In Daredevil's case, I thought that each successive writer had disagreed with what had gone before, that what Marv did had very little in common with what Shooter did, that what McKenzie did had little to do with what Shooter did, etc.

HOWELL: There were some surface continuities, like Shooter was concerned with Daredevil being concerned with victims, for instance, and I believe it was Marv who set up the storefront....

MILLER: Uh-huh.

HOWELL: ...so they have this immediate access point to these victims.

MILLER: And there were some things which could only happen during the confusion when the writers switch. Foggy's wife was kidnapped...he just forgot about it for about two years. And there was this big mystery about who hired Paladin to hunt down The Purple Man, but you never found out. So what I've had to do is pick and choose, and extrapolate new material of my own.

HOWELL: Speaking of Foggy's wife, is she just window dressing on the list of supporting characters?

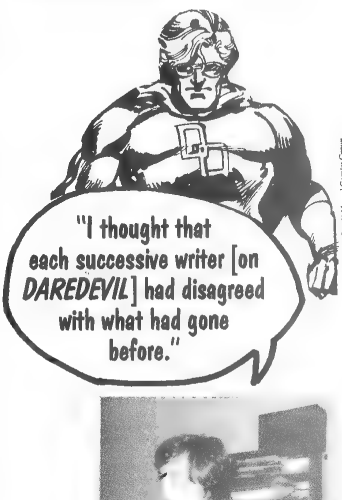
MILLER: Yes. One of the problems with ***DAREDEVIL*** is that it has a supporting cast that with the exception of Foggy, is all female. And coming on the book, I found that they all had the same color hair. And they all had to be gorgeous.

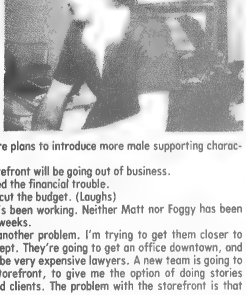
KALISH: Very confusing.

MILLER: So I've been working on it. I changed Becky's hair color to brown.

KALISH: She's supposed to be plain anyway.

MILLER: (Laughs) I gave them various props and features to distinguish them from each other.





KALISH: Are there plans to introduce more male supporting characters?

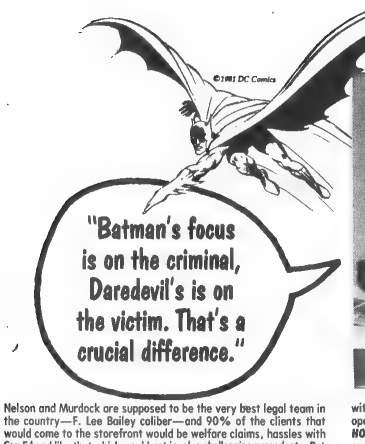
MILLER: The storefront will be going out of business.

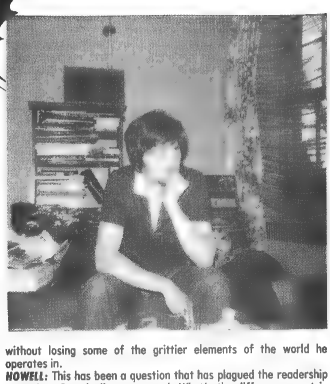
HOWELL: I noticed the financial trouble.

MILLER: Reagan cut the budget. (Laughs)

KALISH: Nobody's been working. Neither Matt nor Foggy has been in the office for weeks.

MILLER: That's another problem. I'm trying to get them closer to the original concept. They're going to get an office downtown, and they're going to be very expensive lawyers. A new team is going to take over the storefront, to give me the option of doing stories with impoversherd clients. The problem with the storefront is that





Nelson and Murdock are supposed to be the very best legal team in the country—F. Lee Bailey caliber—and 90% of the clients that would come to the storefront would be welfare claims, hassles with Con Ed and like that which would not involve challenging precedents. But it *is* in character for Matt to sponsor something like that. It's also in character for him to be smart enough to have a big tax write-off. So that is what's being done with that. There will be some characters introduced in the process. I'm trying to do this without cramming everybody in, trying to make it an interesting enough sequence of issues that accomplish what I want to do. You can't be too abrupt. It's cheating.

HOWELL: What would you say to the popular, but somewhat outdated, opinion that Daredevil is Marvel's Batman?

MILLER: I'd say The Punisher is Marvel's Batman.

KALISH: Really? Why?

MILLER: Because he's Batman without his impurities. The side of Batman that makes him spare the criminals is something that's added on. It's not part of the basic concept of his character.

HOWELL: That's kind of an interesting analysis of a virtue as a failing.

MILLER: An impurity, perhaps. Batman's a character I would love to sink my teeth into, because I can see all kinds of things I could do with him. But as far as comparing him to Daredevil, I'd say Daredevil's basic concept is very dissimilar. I see Daredevil as someone who operates on a basic motive of love for seeking out justice.

KALISH: It's positive motivation?

MILLER: Yes. And I see Batman's as negative. He's punishing those who killed his parents. Batman's focus is on the criminal, Daredevil's is on the victim. That's a crucial different. However, there are obviously *close* visual resemblences. The whole "creature of the night" riff in Daredevil obviously relates to and comes from Batman. Because Daredevil's blind, it seems to me very obvious that he'd want to operate in the darkness—it's to his advantage to have his enemies as blind as he is. And the whole "devil" motif conjures some nice visuals. But I'm also trying to develop him as a guy with a terrific sense of humor, who scares criminals and has a great time doing it. Like The Creeper, he laughs and laughs and laughs, and thinks, "Jeez, they're buying it!" I want to work some of that into his characterization. He was conceived to be a rather joyous character originally, and I want to bring some of that back, without losing some of the grittier elements of the world he operates in.

HOWELL: This has been a question that has plagued the readership ever since Daredevil was created: What's the difference—not in origin, but in handling—between Daredevil and Spider-Man?

MILLER: Oh! That's a good question. Daredeyil's older. I think he's thirty.

HOWELL: I think that's justifiable.

MILLER: An established lawyer should be forty, but that's a bit old for a superhero. So, I'd say he's thirty. With his concern for the victim, he's a much more consciously moral character than Spider-Man. He's very concerned with the issues involved with each question or decision he faces and he thinks out exactly what each is before he does it.

HOWELL: So he's not a spur-of-the-moment type?

MILLER: No. The spur of the moment stuff is when he's out on the roof-tops having a great time. But that's him being a kid, the acrobat his father never let him be. Because of his constant concern on morality, I think he's different than Spider-Man, who's really wrapped up in himself. Daredevil's concerns are with the right and wrong of the world around him. Spider-Man's concerned with himself. The only similarities I've seen is the way they talk, that "snappy patter" stuff (which Daredevil doesn't do anymore) and the fact that they both swung from lines (which Daredevil doesn't do anymore). I've tried to make him less like Spider-Man.

KALISH: Do you think Daredevil actually has an analogy? Another character who's very close to him in attitude? You don't have to draw on comics here.

MILLER: Oh! In that case, I see a little of what I'm after in a character like Kojak, even though visually, they're different. (laughs) A moral man in an amoral circumstance. I think that kind of character, if he were real, would be an anchor to his friends—someone who they know they could count on.

HOWELL: A little like The Question, though not taken that far.

MILLER: Not taken that far at all.

HOWELL: Is there a possibility Daredevil's moral sense could lead him to becoming an enemy of the people?

MILLER: I don't believe so. I mean, his whole emphasis on law...

KALISH: Is Daredevil a vigilante? Is he out to uphold the law, or is he a crusader for justice?

MILLER: That's one of the funny problems of the character. I think

as they come in conflict, they will be individually judged. I really think that that question is best answered by instance of Daredevil's conduct as they arise. It just occurred to me as I worked on the "Bullseye" story, for instance, that certain issues were at work here that could really define Daredevil.

HOWELL: You hadn't plotted those scenes in for that purpose?

MILLER: Well, I plotted them out completely, but I allowed myself enough room so that when an inspired moment came along, I have the room to turn a scene, to do thing with a character. That whole "***Kingpin***" sequence was affected by the "***Bullseye***" story and was changed by it, by the bonds I was setting up between Daredevil and Bullseye. I'm doing a scene, and something will occur to me, and I'll put it down, and it will affect the next one—so that allows for a certain degree of spontaneity. It's much more difficult when you do a plot, or a script and then the artist draws it, and that is that. You can't come up with too many inspired changes because it's out of your hands.

HOWELL: In terms of actually working on a story, do you work right from pencils?

MILLER: No, I do small lay-outs. I do the entire story this way, which takes about three days. And then I write and type the script, and then I pencil the pages, sometimes adjusting the script as I go.

HOWELL: We've heard you say that the comics medium is the perfect medium for telling stories. In the "***Upstart Interview***," [***COMICS FEATURE #10***] you gove the opinion that super-hero stories were ***not*** in existence and comics created to accomodate them—it was the other way around: First there was the comics medium, and those working in it evolved the most effective way to make use of their medium.

MILLER: Yeah, I believe that super-heroes are a very natural product of comic books, and that's why they work so well in comics, the same way funny animals took over animation.

HOWELL: Do you think that might be in part why the non-super hero genres, like romance and detective comics, have by and large died out?

MILLER: That's one of the reasons. Another reason, I think is that the comic books currently being produced are by people who grew up reading super-hero comic books—there's a generation of us. In some cases, that's all they know. Another reason is the audience seems to have gotten smaller. There seems to be little attempt to approach anyone outside the current audience. Marvel seems to be gearing more and more projects to its fan audience.

KALISH: The fan shops.

MILLER: Exactly. The books that seem to be designed for low print, guaranteed sale.

It shows how insulated this business is from the entertainment world, that the kung-fu craze hit, but Marvel didn't come out with a kung-fu comic until after the craze had petered out. And DC didn't come out with a kung-fu comic until several years after that.

HOWELL: And you can even question the whole basis of exploiting a trend, anyway.

MILLER: Well, supposedly, we're in this to sell copies. To do this, we give the audience what they want. Or we teach them to want what we give. Also, I often find myself doing a story that involves a trend, because I'm getting into that trend. I'm a part of the TV audience, the movie audience, and I'm affected by what I see.

HOWELL: Have you ever found yourself, under instruction, or otherwise, doing a story about a trend you don't feel, that you're not into, just because you know it's popular?

MILLER: You mean disco stories? (Laughs) Since I've been on ***DAREDEVIL***, I've had a lot of control. The stories in the books are stories I really enjoy working on. The only trend story I can think of that I've done is the Ninja thing, and that was something I chose to do. When I hear about stories that are done about fads I don't like, I just avoid those assignments.

HOWELL: I was also thinking of fads that are somewhat more subtle than that. There's been almost an affirmative action drive over the last four years to get more female protagonists acting agressively. However, no one wants to put characters in books to balance off what has been perceived as forty years of wimp-outs.

MILLER: Yeah, that's a good point. I believe in that trend very much. It's not only just women; ***DAREDEVIL***'s ready made to feature any group who has not been treated well or has been ignored or stereotyped. I think the idea of a wheelchair-bound secretary was brilliant.

HOWELL: Was she Roger McKenzie's idea?

MILLER: Yes. The best thing about her is that her impairment is

"That whole *'Kingpin'* sequence was affected by the *'Bullseye'* story and was changed by it, by the bonds I was setting up between Daredevil and Bullseye."

downplayed. She's a secretary, she's a character, and...oh, yeah...she's in a wheel chair. No big deal about it. By and large, that's what I intend to do with her—that's a statement of its own. That's also the reason I didn't make that lady D.A. character a love interest: which occurred to me. I simply want her to function as Matt's Hamilton Burger, with no reference to her sex. That's really the way to do it. You don't have to make an issue of it. You can have people obviously doing their jobs, and doing them well. I notice that on TV, they make some effort towards having incidental characters whose color or sex is not traditional. I remember one TV show I saw once. There was a black blind psychiatrist, and they made no mention of the fact that he was blind or black. This was a number of years ago when probably both were issues.

KALISH: Sounds interesting.

HOWELL: It also means more awareness, at least on the part of the artist.

MILLER: I do believe that to some degree, an artist owes a certain amount of awareness to his audience. If I made every black character in ***DAREDEVIL*** a street punk, I'd be implying something. I would be perpetuating something that isn't just an oversimplification—it's a lie.

KALISH: This ties in a little before about what you were saying about education. It seems that even when you're doing comics, like ***DAREDEVIL***, you're aware of their educational nature, socialization value—maybe even real hard facts. Do you think that all comic books can carry that same impact?

MILLER: I think that any story where you've got the good guy slugging the bad guy carries with it a certain educational message. Bad guys lose, good guys win. Right and wrong. These are morality plays—even the ones that get so complex that we're not sure which one's the good guy. But these complex ones are rare. By and large, in comics, the lead character is on the side of good. And in order to do a story about someone on the side of good, you have to define what good is. If you do a story in which Dr. Doom is out to conquer the world and the Fantastic Four is to stop him, you're saying it's bad to control people. Or, if you do a story where Matt Murdock is in love with his secretary, but because he is blind, he can't tell her, because she'd have to pity him, you're saying something horrible about blind people. You're saying they can only be loved as objects of pity. So there are certain implicit statements in whatever you do.

HOWELL: It has a certain amount of propaganda impact, too.

MILLER: It's not my intention to make propaganda. My one attempt at it was a dismal failure. That was the "Angel Dust" story, and having read it since, I can see why. It was just too preachy. I don't think I do propaganda, now because with propaganda, your material is designed to convey a certain message, and fails as entertainment. I believe any moral issues should come from the material, not be imposed on it.

HOWELL: You've spoken a couple of times of some responsibility to your readers. Who are they?

MILLER: Oh-Oh! (Laughs) I just got called. That's a good question. I don't know if anyone's checked. I have to assume that my readers include a large number of young children. But they're not the ones who write most of the letters. At least, with ***DAREDEVIL*** most of the people who write the letters are obviously literate enough to write a well-composed letter. Obviously, there are a lot of adult readers out there. But I have been instructed, and will continue to gear my material ***at least*** to the understanding of children.

HOWELL: Do you feel that necessarily weakens it at all?

MILLER: No. It's just the rules I play by. I've been hired to do morality plays that children can read for Marvel Comics, and I'm having a great time doing them the way I'm doing them. They don't have to be shallow.

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new/old scripter of
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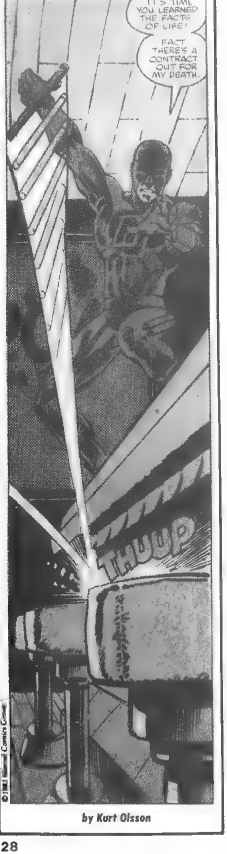
An analysis of the story-telling style of *DAREDEVIL*'s dynamic writer/artist



by Kurt Olsson

If he were still alive (and a comics fan) Henry Ford would feel flattered. The assembly line, a process he had shown to be beneficial to both industry and society, would be evident every time Ford glanced at a comic book's credit page. One cannot be sure, though, how he would feel about Frank Miller's work as writer/artist on ***DAREDEVIL***. On one hand, Miller, by doing the work of both the writer and artist, has been fouling up the assembly line, but on the other hand Miller has been doing a good job handling both positions.

An assembly line approach has nearly always been used by comic book publishers to speed up the creative portion of comics production for over forty years. Today, the division of labor has pretty much become the ***status quo***: Writer, penciller, inker, letterer, and colorist all do their well-defined part in putting together a comic, with the writer and penciller (and sometimes the inker) the major factors behind any comic's creative direction.

Unfortunately, as the American public has learned through the example of the auto industry, the assembly line has some inherent problems which still need to be solved. This is true in today's comics, too, since the assembly line process intrinsically hampers comics. By definition, the comics form is the integration of words and pictures, so when a writer controls the words and a penciller controls the pictures, this integration is more difficult to accomplish—two heads usually aren't better than one in this case. A cry has occasionally arisen pointing this fact out, but the assembly line is still entrenched and, unless a revolution occurs in the industry, will probably remain entrenched. There are a few exceptions to this comics production philosophy, though, and one of those exceptions, Frank Miller, is giving readers good reason to hope the writer/artist position doesn't go the way of the horse and buggy because of the assembly line.

The advantages of the writer/artist role should be obvious. The writer/artist, when writing the story, does not have to worry about how the artist will transform his vision of the story, and neither does he, as artist—in a "Marvel-style" creative combination—have to entertain apprehensions about which words the writer will place with his pictures. Sometimes, an artist can make a story better (usually because the story isn't very good to begin with), but most times the original impulses the writer had are either lost or blurred when the artist incorporates his own vision into the story. This blurring of a comic book's vision usually results in a story not being streamlined so that there is a waste of words and pictures as each creator pulls harder to get his point across. Frank Miller, as writer/artist of ***DAREDEVIL***, has avoided these pitfalls; he has also brought to ***DAREDEVIL*** the best cinematic storytelling style a super-hero title has had since Will Eisner's ***THE SPIRIT***.

High praise such as that has to be backed up, though, not just taken as fact by the reader. One example of Miller's abilities as an innovative storyteller took place in the second issue of his tenure as writer/artist (***DAREDEVIL #169***), the scene at the Times Square theater in which Bullseye went berserk while two movie-goers commented on the movie being shown, ***THE MALTESE FALCON***. At first glance, this scene may not have seemed all that special; a second, more penetrating glance gives evidence of Miller's storytelling talent.

In this issue of ***DAREDEVIL***, the hero learned that Bullseye had escaped from the hospital where he was to have had a brain tumor removed before it killed him. Meanwhile, Bullseye, having been driven insane by the tumor, was trying to escape from a city full of Daredevils (a paranoia induced by the tumor). In the particular scene under examination, Bullseye sat in a darkened theater, musing to himself that he was hiding from "the devils." The next panel introduced the two ***schlappy*** movie-goers who, while stuffing their faces with popcorn, were also hiding. By escaping into the world of films, the two movie buffs were hiding from the real world, just as Bullseye, in the next seat over, was hiding from his own perception of reality. The movie buffs, instead of only being comedy relief, were also being employed here by Miller as a parallel to Bullseye. The confusion which Bullseye felt over what was reality and what was fantasy was mirrored by the two movie buffs as they were oblivious to Bullseye's insane rampage just a row behind them.

The action then shifted to Daredevil in a very smooth storytelling transition. One of the people in the theater left, mumbling he had to leave because of the ruckus Bullseye was causing. Daredevil, who was scouring the rooftops for Bullseye, heard this, questioned the man, then ran off in the direction of the theater. The movement from panel to panel flowed easily, so that the reader never wondered where he was or what was happening—the result of well thought-out storytelling.

After a brief interlude at the Storefront Legal Clinic's Christmas party, the scene switched back to Bullseye's rampage at the theater, as Daredevil entered the action. Daredevil asked Bullseye to stop because he was sick. Bullseye refused, and a nicely choreographed fight scene between Daredevil and Bullseye followed. Like the scene mentioned last paragraph, the flow from panel to panel moved easily, and Miller made what could have been an average dull slugfest into something spectacular. By using odd angle shots which changed every panel, Miller heightened the drama and prevented the fight from being static.

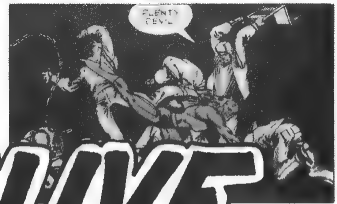
The reader's friends, the two movie buffs, reappeared, still oblivious to what had happened around them, as Daredevil temporarily subdued Bullseye. Here, Miller used the movie buffs again, but for a slightly different reason. While the more eloquent movie fan commented on "the frightening, yet attractive nature of violence" (page 14, panel 2), Bullseye brutally escaped from Daredevil's grasp, then smashed Daredevil across the face

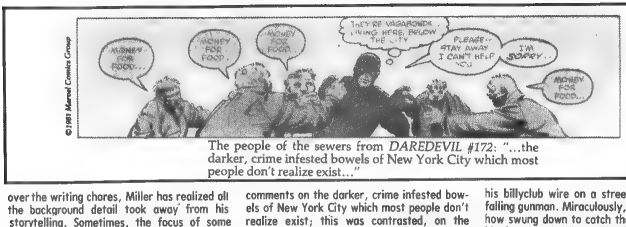
with a boot. Bullseye leaped toward the still unsuspecting pair, while the eloquent fan continued to talk about the dichotomy between the frightening and attractive nature of violence. Bullseye interrupted him by grabbing his friend, and in a powerful showdown, Bullseye, his contorted features making his face look like a skull, ordered Daredevil to drop his billyclub or he'd kill the movie-goer. The Man Without Fear made his choice, and as Daredevil collapsed after being hit by Bullseye's knife, the reader realized the irony of the scene. Miller showed the reader that violence may be frightening, but it certainly isn't attractive.

Because of the tight integration of words and pictures, Miller has been able to use more panels per page than nearly every other artist working in four-color comics today (in the **"Bullseye"** issue (**DAREDEVIL #169**), Miller placed an average of eight panels on each page), and he has used these panels for good effect. Since he is both writer and artist, Miller can allow himself the space to show subtle changes in facial expression, and he should know exactly what facial expression for every panel (an advantage most artists at Marvel don't enjoy because of the plot sketch approach used by nearly all Marvel writers), advantages which have also made his issues on **DAREDEVIL** more emotionally facile than most comics today. A good example of Miller's integrated use of facial expressions can be found in **DAREDEVIL #172**. Miller focused his attention on the face and shoulders of Turk, a thug who has almost become a regular member of the book's cast. On page three of that issue, Turk was gloating over the fact he had just (seemingly) killed Daredevil. In five panels the reader saw Turk: 1) relaxed and smug, 2) surprised as someone tapped on his shoulder, 3) incredulous as he recognized the hand on his shoulder as Daredevil's, 4) hopelessly dejected as he realized what this meant, and 5) cowed as he hoped Daredevil wouldn't be too angry about his attempting to kill him. The changes in facial expression were easily as clear and easily apprehended as these descriptions have suggested, but Miller didn't rely on facial expression alone to show the changes. Miller also used body language. His shoulders sagging, Turk was slouched over his bar stool at the beginning of the sequence, but by the end, he was no longer relaxed; he was sitting up in his stool and his shoulders had straightened. Such attention to the expressiveness of such detail is rare these days in comics.

Of course, when most readers think of detail in comics, they consider how similar something on the comics page is to the real thing. Miller seemed to be much the same way when he first began pencilling. Readers marveled at his gritty and realistic depiction of New York City, but as time has worn on, Miller has shifted away from those detailed backdrops to simpler, moodier backgrounds. Although readers might complain about the lack of those realistic backgrounds in the issues since he took

FRANK MILLER MAKES DAREDEVIL COME ALIVE





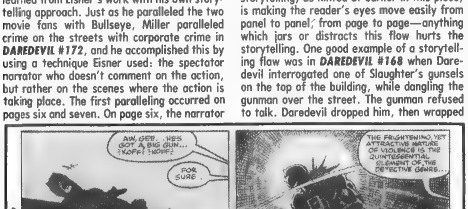
The people of the sewers from *DAREDEVIL #172*: "...the darker, crime infested bowels of New York City which most people don't realize exist..."

over the writing chores, Miller has realized all the background detail took away from his storytelling. Sometimes, the focus of some Miller panels was lost in the lush background, so the reader would be confused momentarily about what was happening in the panel, or distracted from the panel's purpose in the story sequence—and that's a fine definition of weak storytelling. Recently, Miller has simplified his drawing style, so that only the important elements of each panel stand out to the reader, and Miller's storytelling has become easier to follow because of it. Miller now joins other artists who have changed from a more illustrative style to a looser, cartoonier style. One of those artists, of course, is Will Eisner.

Some people contest that comparing Miller with Eisner is either untrue or unfair, but after looking at Miller's work so far in ***DAREDEVIL***, one must think Miller wants the comparison to be made. On several occasions, Miller has paid homages to Eisner (the SPIRIT sign on page 3, panel 5 of ***DAREDEVIL #170***, for example, or characters such as Doctor Glass), but the most fully realized homage was in ***DAREDEVIL #172***, the last third of the ***"Kingpin"*** trilogy.

From the ***SPIRIT***-reminiscent splash page to the end, Miller mixed techniques he must have learned from Eisner's work with his own storytelling approach. Just as he paralleled the two movie fans with Bullseye, Miller paralleled crime on the streets with corporate crime in ***DAREDEVIL #172***, and he accomplished this by using a technique Eisner used: the spectator narrator who doesn't comment on the action, but rather on the scenes where the action is taking place. The first paralleling occurred on pages six and seven. On page six, the narrator comments on the darker, crime infested bowels of New York City which most people don't realize exist; this was contrasted, on the next page, to the glamorous, almost godlike skyscrapers dominating the city's skyline. These first panels on both pages only seemed to contrast each other, though, because as the narrator implied and the action showed after each first panel, they actually were very much alike. In the bowels of the city, The Kingpin was planning his revenge, while in the skyscrapers overlooking the city, other crime lords were planning how they should deal with The Kingpin. In the lowly and the godly, the criminal element flourishes, an ironic comment on mankind. Here, the reader saw Miller employ the spectator narrator as an ironic device —just as Eisner did—but Miller also used it to set the scenes of this story. In that manner, Miller didn't have to rely on captions (which would have hurt the story's frenetic pacing) to give the setting for each scene switch. So, instead of having the spectator narrator be an artifice in the story, Miller used it to help his storytelling.

Miller isn't quite on the level with Eisner's wizardry yet, though. He still has problems, but these probably lie in his relative inexperience as a storyteller and writer. The art of storytelling, as hinted at earlier in this piece, is making the reader's eyes move easily from panel to panel; from page to page—anything which jars or distracts this flow hurts the storytelling. One good example of a storytelling flow was in ***DAREDEVIL #168*** when Daredevil interrogated one of Slaughter's gunsels on the top of the building, while dangling the gunman over the street. The gunman refused to talk. Daredevil dropped him, then wrapped his billyclub wire on a streetlamp below the falling gunman. Miraculously, Daredevil somehow swung down to catch the thug before he hit the ground. What Miller forgot to show or tell the reader was that Daredevil reeled in his billyclub wire so that he could catch up to the falling thug. This may not seem to be much of an error, but when a reader is forced to go back through a scene to understand it, the storytelling hasn't done its job. Errors like this probably will be less of a problem the more comics work Miller does.


AW, GEE... HE'S GOT A BIG GUN... I HOPE I WIN!
FOR SURE
THE FRIGHTENING, YET ATTRACTIVE NATURE OF VIOLENCE IS THE QUINTESSENTIAL TEMPTATION OF THE DETECTIVE GENRE.
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Ironic commentary on the main action by passers-by.

As looking at Miller's ***DAREDEVIL*** work shows, one person's vision can more easily integrate words and pictures than when the role of a storyteller is split into writer and artist. Vision can be used in a different sense, too. Vision can also be the direction in which the plotter decides to take the comic book. Since Miller has taken over the writing chores, ***DAREDEVIL*** has seen its direction change. Under the book's previous writer, Roger McKenzie, Daredevil had become almost a clone of The Batman. Just as criminals see The Batman as a grim creature of the night, McKenzie had the crime world start seeing Daredevil as a "devil." With this departure from the past, Daredevil, the swashbuckling hero, was replaced by a grim avenger who seemed to enjoy being equated with a "devil." During the McKenzie issues, Daredevil cast ominous devil-shaped shadows over villains and even questioned a thug while perched on an amusement park statue of Satan. So much for subtlety.

If anyone missed the symbolism, McKenzie went as far as to change Daredevil's origin. In ***DAREDEVIL #1***, Matthew Murdock became Daredevil to bring his father's murderers to justice. McKenzie reworked the origin in ***DAREDEVIL #164*** so that Daredevil got revenge for his father's murder. Instead of tripping Slade (the man who shot Matt's father) before questioning him as in ***DAREDEVIL #1***, the McKenzie Daredevil brutally beat up Slade in a boxing ring. In addition—although both renditions showed Daredevil chasing the Fixer until he dropped dead—Stan Lee and Bill Everett's Fixer of ***DAREDEVIL #1*** never screamed that Daredevil was (yes, you guessed it) a "devil."

The changes McKenzie incorporated into his rendition of Daredevil's origin made Daredevil a vengeance-seeker, rather than a justice-bringer. This was made explicitly clear in the manner in which Daredevil finished relating his

BULLSEYE, JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO I SAVED YOUR LIFE.
I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT YOU DO WITH IT.
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"Miller decided it was time to bring back Daredevil, the man of justice, rather than continuing to characterize him as the vengeance-seeker of McKenzie's stint."

version to Ben Urich. Rather than telling Urich he brought Slade to justice by tricking him into confessing before the police (as revealed in ***DAREDEVIL* #1**), McKenzie's Daredevil finished his origin story by telling Urich how he stood over the dead body of the Fixer, thinking: "This one's for you, Dad..." So much for justice.

Roger McKenzie should be commended on his handling of The Batman, though. The problem is, as anyone would know who had been reading ***DAREDEVIL*** the fifteen years before McKenzie took over the title, Daredevil isn't The Batman. Period.

When Miller took over the writing helm with ***DAREDEVIL* #168**, he must have seen this, too. Miller decided it was time to bring back Daredevil, the man of justice, rather than continuing to characterize him as the vengeance-seeker of McKenzie's stint. In his first issue as writer/artist, Miller introduced Elektra who, like Daredevil, lost a father through murder. Unlike Daredevil, she chose not to use her abilities to uphold justice, but instead became a bounty hunter, a ruthless vengeance-seeker similar to what McKenzie's Daredevil was becoming. Returning to Daredevil's portrayal in the past, Miller had Daredevil realize Elektra, although his first love, represented everything he despised. Daredevil didn't turn her in to the law at the end of the story (maybe out of old times' sake), but Miller clearly illustrated the difference between Daredevil, the hero, and Elektra, the vengeance-seeker.

Miller followed up on this lead in the next issue, an issue in which he further delineated Daredevil as hero, rather than vengeance seeker. In this story, Daredevil, weak and dazed after defeating Bullseye, had the option to either leave Bullseye on the tracks, thereby letting the oncoming train kill him and end his threat to society, or he could save Bullseye so that one day he would be free to kill again. Miller's Daredevil, a hero with the burden of morals, chose the latter. Daredevil, even though he hated everything Bullseye was and represented, knew he couldn't play God, couldn't be a murderer. Daredevil acknowledged Bullseye might kill again, but that was something he knew he would have to live with, and try to prevent through every means.

Two issues later, Bullseye (after being cleared by the courts) killed again. The man died in front of Daredevil's eyes. In the next issue (***DAREDEVIL* #172**), Daredevil confronted Bullseye again, defeated him, but—even with The Kingpin's leave—wouldn't kill him. Daredevil only returned Bullseye to the police, leaving himself to bear some of the guilt for Bullseye having killed again.

Miller's stint on ***DAREDEVIL*** hasn't just been experiments in heroic moralism, though. Humor and Daredevil's swashbuckling image, two elements for the most part lost during McKenzie's tenure, have returned, but both have been much more subdued than the days when Daredevil was almost a swashbuckling Spiderman, probably because Miller has characterized Daredevil as an older, grimmer, and wiser hero. The swashbuckler is still around, though, as evidenced in ***DAREDEVIL* #171** when Matt literally swept Heather off her feet, and Daredevil's sense of humor has also reemerged, as evidenced in ***DAREDEVIL* #169**, when Daredevil surreptitiously stole a piece of evidence out of Lieutenant Manolis' overcoat, then returned it, to the bemusement of the officers whom Manolis was lecturing.

Unfortunately, as in the McKenzie issues, most of the humor in ***DAREDEVIL*** centers upon Foggy Nelson, a character most recent writers have confused with Fozzie Bear. Miller, along with every ***DAREDEVIL*** writer in the past seven years, has demeaned the dignity of Foggy's character, so that the reader laughs ***at*** Foggy, rather than ***with*** him. One must remember that in ***DD* #1**, Foggy was termed "Fun Loving" Foggy Nelson, not Foggy "The Fool" Nelson. Hopefully, the problems Miller has hinted at concerning Foggy mean Miller will work over Foggy's character, just as he did with Daredevil's character.

Foggy's characterization, or the lack of it, ties in with my only major qualm with Miller's work so far as writer/artist on ***DAREDEVIL***. For the most part, Daredevil's supporting cast has been missing. Foggy and Heather have appeared only a few times recently, and the reader has seen very little of the man behind the mask, Matthew Murdock. Matt Murdock and company don't deserve to be ignored, since they are principal reasons this book has became endearing to so many readers, for so long.

One doubts the absence of the supporting cast has anything to do with Miller's ability to characterize, though, especially when noticing how well he has handled the villains who have appeared in this book. Elektra, Bullseye (before and after his tumor operation), and The Kingpin: all these villains have been well fleshed-out. In fact, Miller's concentration on his villains has been one of his major strengths (along with his handling of Daredevil's character) of his writing. The ***"Kingpin"*** trilogy was an excellent example of this; The Kingpin was as much the star of this three-piece as was Daredevil. The trilogy centered on The Kingpin's love for his wife, Vanessa, and what he would do to get her back. Miller carefully showed how the Kingpin's evil nature was subdued by the love he felt for his wife. Then, after she was kidnapped and "killed," nothing was left to check that evil part of the Kingpin's nature. Manipulating the lieutenants he had left in charge of the mob, The Kingpin ruthlessly returned to the throne of the New York City underworld, and through different means, he convinced both Bullseye and Daredevil to not fight him at critical times. Never before had the true horrifying potential of the Kingpin's character been revealed—even Daredevil was aghast when he met The Kingpin for the first time—until this trilogy. And the nature of The Kingpin's monstrousness had never been portrayed as well as it was in the climax of the trilogy when The Kingpin confronted and literally crushed the man, a trusted lieutenant, who "killed" his wife. Here, all Miller's strengths were evidenced. Storytelling, mood, characterization all came together in one terrifying scene as The Kingpin explained to his wife's killer the loneliness he felt before he discovered Vanessa's love; the haunted look on the Kingpin's face disappeared when his finished his explanation, along with his humanity, and he crushed the man he thought had murdered Vanessa.

Although McKenzie did some good things on ***DAREDEVIL***, no issue of his earned its emotional power more than the last issue of the ***"Kingpin"*** trilogy. McKenzie had improved a stagnating title, but Miller, through strong storytelling and a vision truer to Daredevil's concept, has revitalized ***DAREDEVIL*** to the point of making it one of the best comics on the stands today. Despite Miller's fouling the assembly line process, I think Henry Ford, our hypothetical comics fan, would agree.

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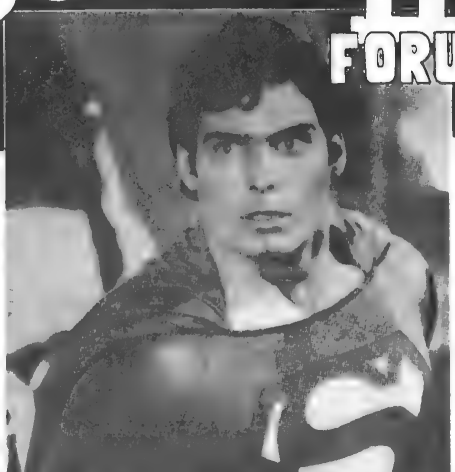
SUPERMAN II FORUM



SUPERMAN II, like its predecessor, is a movie phenomenon too important to the future of comics in this country to be viewed from only one viewpoint. In this special section, three of *COMICS FEATURE*'s staff of reviewers examine the next chapter in the Salkinds' series of super adventure films, each from their own distinctive point of view.

NON COMICS MENTIS

by Rich Morrissey

A reader of "***Superman***" during the Mort Weisinger era, transported into the future and unaware of recent tradition in the naming of movie sequels, would be likely to think ***SUPERMAN II*** was a movie about the son of the original Superman. A fan of the Julius Schwartz era, paradoxically, might think it dealt with an even *more* original version of Superman—the hero of the original stories before and during World War II, whose world has now been designated as "Earth-Two" by Schwartz. The vast majority of movie viewers, of course, wouldn't reach either of these conclusions—yet in some ways, both are accurate. For ***SUPERMAN II*** presents a Superman who is at once more current than the one of the present-day comics (having lived in Metropolis for less than three years, as opposed to the 11 to 27 years the comic book character has spent there) and as fresh as the original Superman of the 1930s was during *his* earliest adventures.

Oh, there were loose ends in ***SUPERMAN II***—and I wouldn't be the continuity buff I am if I didn't try to tie them up. These are the ones that I've heard mentioned most often...

The inconsistent powers. Perhaps John Byrne was right, at least with regard to *this* version of Superman, in his contention that Kryptonian powers are psionic rather than physical in origin—which explains why the Phantom Zone criminals developed slightly different ones, like the power to levitate people and ob-

jects with eye beams. It could also explain how Ursa could be bitten by that snake—although I suspect its fangs *did* break off, and that she was just shocked by the sudden contact. No explanation is necessary for the villains and Superman appearing in several places at the end, and Lois putting her hand through Superman—it was simply the old Flash trick of moving so fast after-images are left behind.

How did Superman and Lois get to and from the Fortress so relatively easily after he lost his powers? Well, the Fortress isn't *at* the North Pole—it's built into a mountain, which isn't easy to find at the Pole. Nor was there any evidence as to where that diner was; it was probably a great distance from Metropolis, or Clark wouldn't have risked using his powers in front of people who might see him again. If both the Fortress and the bar are in northern Canada or Greenland, the round trip isn't hard to swallow.

How did Superman, after giving up his powers "forever," get them back? Beats me. It obviously had something to do with that green crystal, but in this case I can't get around the fact that it was simply a case of sloppy editing.

Why didn't General Zod use his superhearing to listen to what Superman was saying to Luthor? He probably did. That's why Superman told Luthor exactly what he ***wanted*** Zod to hear, whether Luthor told him or not.

What happened to the villains at the end? Presumably Superman took Luthor and the now-powerless Kryptonians to jail—but there too, I have to agree that it should have been either shown or mentioned.

After all, these loose ends are no worse than those of most other current films, which these days usually have one advantage that ***SUPERMAN II*** didn't have—the survival of the shooting script in other media to help explain things that didn't make it into the finished picture. What stuck in my mind was the way they captured the essence of the characters and their relationship so perfectly. Granted, Luthor was even farther from his characterization in the comics than he was in ***SUPERMAN, THE MOVIE***, and General Zod had absolutely nothing in common with his comic book counterpart except the name and origin (unless, as I suspect, Non was one of the Bizarro duplicates of himself Zod created to conquer Krypton), but none of this matters. They were still worthy adversaries for Superman (and Luthor was even perversly likeable, with a con-man personality much more appealing than the mass murderer of the original)—and it was the exploration of Superman's conflict between his responsibilities to the world and his love for Lois Lane that made ***SUPERMAN II*** more memorable than did all the special effects put together. Don't get me wrong; it was thrilling to see Curt Swan's pictures come to life as Superman battled the Kryptonian criminals—but it was even more moving to see Christopher Reeve and Margot Kidder brilliantly bring the relationship between Superman, Lois Lane, and Clark Kent to life.

AS THE METROPOLIS MARVEL PLOPS INTO THE SAND BEHIND A CABANA SUPPOSEDLY OCCUPIED BY HIS ALTER-EGO...
I DON'T KNOW WHY I PUT UP WITH A BORN DRAG LIKE CLARK!
HE'S BEEN RUNNING INTO SWIM-TRUNKS FOR TEN MINUTES NOW!
© 1981 DC Comics
"...Lois has never returned [Clark's] love."

It's a relationship that's changed a great deal over 43 years and through several different versions of the characters—but one that's still fundamentally the same as Jerry Siegel and Shuster developed for the Earth-Two Superman in his first appearance in ***ACTION COMICS #1***. Clark Kent's love for Lois Lane has remained unchanged, but whether she despises him as a coward, or sympathizes with him as a klutz, or considers him a good friend whose company she enjoys, Lois has never returned his love. She has entirely different standards for a lover, standards Clark has no chance of meeting. Her ideal man is Superman, but Superman has reasons of his own that make returning Lois' love impossible—his responsibility to the world, the danger of Superman's enemies attacking him through his wife, and the difficulties of consummating his relationship with Lois without killing her have all been given at various times, and any one is really enough.

But the ultimate reason neither Clark nor Superman can have the woman they both love is that they are two sides of the same man—whom Reeve portrays as a believable single personality, and yet so different that the viewer doesn't even need contrived explanations about hypnotic glasses and the like to see why nobody recognizes them as one person. The only chance Clark has of winning Lois is to suppress his Superman persona entirely—something he actually did on Earth-Two due to amnesia (***ACTION #484***) but that his conscience would prevent him from doing for very long under any other circumstances. For the world needs Superman (and even the real world would be much better off with one; Kryptonian invaders may not exist here, but terrorists, regrettably, do), and so does the idealistic Kal-El—and, as long as he needs both his personae, neither can achieve full potential.

It's no coincidence that one of the most widely-acclaimed Superman stories of all time—Cary Bates and Elliot Maggin's "***Clark Kent Forever—Superman Never***" in ***SUPERMAN #297***—used this exact theme of Clark giving up his powers to develop and consummate his relationship with Lois. Unlike her movie counterpart, the Lois of the comics never entirely realized what was going on—but even the movie Lois ultimately gave up her knowledge of Kal-El's double identity voluntarily. It's something she subconsciously prefers ***not*** to know, even though she may attempt to prove it at times (as she did in the movie, though thankfully only briefly enough to prevent it from becoming the cliche it was in the comics of the 1960s)—or even secretly know it anyway, as it has been hinted in recent years she does. It's the sacrifice she makes to maintain a relationship that, although not perfect, both she and Clark/Superman realize is the best they can hope for—and one that is, in its way, the most enduring part of the Superman legend.

ALMOST SUPERMAN

by Bob Soron

SUPERMAN II is almost many things. The producers set out a number of goals, which generally were nearly attained, but never quite. The main problem was over-ambition; I am not so certain that very many of their goals were attainable at all.

One of their goals was emotion. We were supposed to see not only Superman the mythic being, but also Superman the ***human*** being. To this end, Superman gives up his powers. Sound silly? To show us Superman's humanity, they remove what makes him ***interesting***; we are left with Clark Kent, whom we know to be altogether ***too*** human. We never really find out what Superman is like, because without super-powers, he ***isn't*** Superman.

And, near the end, we see Superman angry, perhaps even worried, that he isn't doing such a hot job of protecting the world, because whenever people as strong as he is show up,

he gets trashed. But he bounces back, and *wins*—he wins. Boy, oh boy! Remember, he won only through a lucky guess that Luthor was going to continue to side with the Kryptonian Three. That isn't heroism—that's shooting craps.

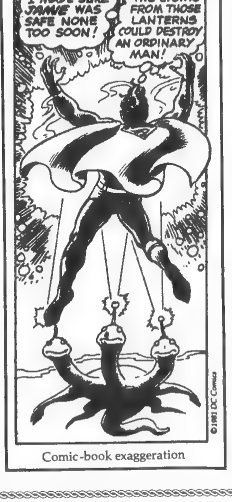
Perhaps the producers' biggest goal was to resemble a comic book. Much is made of the similarity of comics and movies; whether you accept it or not, that similarity did not work here.

The biggest problem the film had resulted from that failure. There was a lot of exaggeration throughout the movie, but it was not exaggeration for dramatic effect; it did not underscore the tension. It was, rather, exaggeration for comedic effect—it ***broke*** the tension. One example from early in the movie: The Kryptonian Three drop in on Nowhere, USA, and meet up with a stereotypical Suth'n sherriff and deppitty. Non picks up the car to retrieve the rifle, and then drops the car. For some reason, the sheriff keeps bouncing around inside long after the car has stopped bouncing.

The exaggeration is particularly bothersome during the big climactic fight scene. Here we have terrible scenes of mass murder and destruction, with random death occurring left and right. And there are the producers, gleefully tossing in sight gag after sight gag. A few people die, and a guy on the telephone loses his balance. Some more people die, and a guy on roller skates is pushed backwards by the wind-blast down the street. And then a few more people die. Yawn.

The result is a shamble. Again, the gags broke the tension. The Kryptonian Three become not super-villains, but mischief-makers more along the lines of Mr. Mxyzptlk. The deaths become not acts of terrorism, but accidents, side-effects of this game.

It reminds me a little of ***POPEYE***'s Sweethaven—the movie's Metropolis could easily be on the same world. There are simply too many eccentric people and items in this movie. It worked wonderfully in ***POPEYE***, which was very surreal; with ***SUPERMAN II***, however, the surreality is out of place; this movie should have a real world with real people. It comes close, but refuses to take the last step.



Comic-book exaggeration

And the effects? They were yet another victim of the overambition of the producers; while they were good, they were not good enough to carry across the desired result. The matted flying effects are frequently clumsy. A couple of times, you could notice people swinging from side to side on the wires as they "flew." And the oh-so-careful editing (which wasn't) fairly screamed, "We're faking it!" at points.

Save for those flaws, I ***did*** like the fight. I thought it was fairly well-paced, with some good rough-and-tumble action (though there could have been more—a couple of times the producers took the easy way out).

I was not able to enjoy the beginning, though. With the occasional exception—as a feinstance, that scene with Lois jumping into the Niagara was as well done as when it was first in ***LOIS LANE***—the construction of the beginning was far too choppy and episodic. It was almost as though it were prepared for television, but was run together for the theaters at the last moment. The switching from scene to scene—before any of them was really resolved, too—also proved aggravating. Generally, each new scene simply set up the ***next*** scene with those characters, which was, while not confusing, annoying. Plenty of flaws could be found in the beginning, too, such as the Kryptonian Three's inexplicable ability to converse with each other in the near-vacumn atmosphere of the moon. (My esteemed boss suggested it was perhaps super-ventriloquism; unlikely, considering the villains were only just discovering that they had super-powers at all at that point.)

And so I cannot call ***SUPERMAN II*** a good movie. It was a bad movie with a few enjoyable scenes in it. And that was not enough.

SECOND TIME UNLUCKY?

by Robert Rhodes

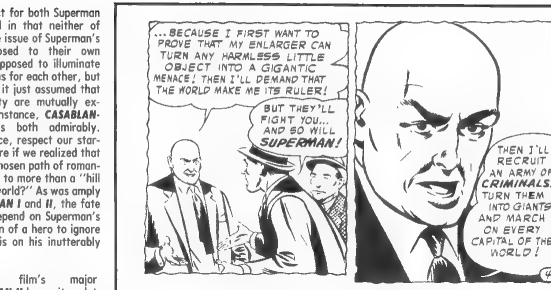
Perhaps the biggest surprise I had upon seeing ***SUPERMAN II*** was that my reaction to it was exactly the same as my reaction to ***SUPERMAN I***: that it had great potential, but it needed editing and focus—and that its ending was unsatisfactory. I'd gotten the idea that ***SUPERMAN I*** was fraught with problems—staff problems, money problems, production problems—and that the producers would learn from their mistakes and, subsequently, turn out a smoother, tighter product. I mean, that's part of the point of a ***series***, isn't it?

Well, not content with one rambling, unfocused epic, the producers of ***SUPERMAN I*** have delivered yet another unto the waiting world, and it is little improvement over its predecessor. The plot, involving Superman's romance with Lois Lane and the threat of the Phantom Zone villains, is crosscut into shards, and the viewer is never really sure which dangling plot elements are meant to be connected up and which were mere oversights. Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the film is the decision about and process through which Superman gives up his powers for love of Lois Lane. I am not convinced that the movie's insistence on the mysterious powers of the Kryptonian crystals allows the scripters to strip a total of four Kryptonians of their natural (in Earth's atmosphere) abilities with no additional adverse effects, return those powers to one of the aliens (with no explanation), and—most inexplicably—allow Superman to converse—not ***listen to***, but ***converse***—with his long-dead mother, Lara. Whatever drama is inherent in the destruction of Krypton in general and the deaths of Superman's parents in particular is significantly undermined by Superman's access to a sentient apparition of his mother—especially if she possesses the capability to step ***out*** of the icy transmitter, apparently three-dimensional, like some extra-terrestial Blue Fairy, telling her son how to sacrifice his powers and telling him his non-super nose will grow if he tells lies. Perhaps I found this episode (and the Krypton-cabinet scene which it immediately precedes) so disappointing because they represented an opportunity for the movie makers to show us the stuff of which a Superman is made: Kal-El weighing his options, deciding if his and Lois' happiness is worth the untold lives which might be lost if Superman no longer exists. The issue was raised later, when the Phantom Zone criminals had already assumed control of

the Earth, but my respect for both Superman and Lois was diminished in that neither of them even considered the issue of Superman's ***responsibilities*** as opposed to their own wishes. Maybe that's supposed to illuminate the depth of their passions for each other, but I find it difficult to have it just assumed that passion and responsibility are mutually exclusive. I've seen, for instance, ***CASABLANCA***, and that sustains both admirably. Wouldn't we, the audience, respect our star-crossed couple all the more if we realized that they realized that their chosen path of romance did indeed amount to more than a "hill of beans in this crummy world?" As was amply demonstrated in ***SUPERMAN I*** and ***II***, the fate of the Earth may well depend on Superman's presence—is it the action of a hero to ignore that for a night with Lois on his inutterably tacky Super-Bed?

Putting that—the film's major problem—aside, ***SUPERMAN II*** has quite a lot of entertainment value, and my quibbles notwithstanding, I am ***not*** recommending comics fans stay away from the movie. As with ***SUPERMAN I***, there is a spectacular "Lois Lane rescue" early on in the film to establish Superman's credentials: this time he saves the pert and curious Ms. Lane from falling down the Eiffel Tower on the underside of an elevator (no, I won't explain further—go see it), and also apprehends a group of terrorists. This sequence is wonderful fun, and were the rest of the movie on its level—conceptually—***SUPERMAN II*** would capture the immediate interest and the unequivocal praises of everyone who saw it. Such is not so, sadly, but the viewer has well over half the picture by which to be enthralled before any major problems arise. The initial scenes of the Phantom Zone villains are excellent, and, although the Kryptonian trio never evidence any real ***evil***, they are still at least threatening, and are inestimably more fitting opponents for the Man of Steel than is the movie's version of Lex Luthor (still played for laughs by Gene Hackman). Lex, sad to say, is back in ***SUPERMAN II*** fulfilling ***his*** original purpose in the series: to entertain the faction of the audience who (here goes) ***can't take any sort of superadventure movie seriously.***

Yes, that's right. Lex Luthor is present in ***SUPERMAN II*** to ensure the mollification of the audience who are too "sophisticated" to appreciate a simple romantic costume-adventure movie (which, underneath it all, ***SUPERMAN II*** certainly is). Lex's exasperating campiness, his lack of either apparent motivation or evident menace, and his refusal to take even his own plots seriously, all serve to undercut whatever dramatic appeal ***SUPERMAN II*** could have worked up on its own. It's very sad indeed that Lex Luthor is regarded by some high-tone critics as the saving grace in an otherwise totally juvenile thriller. If the scope of Luthor's personality were enlarged sufficiently to encompass some real villainy, then perhaps his wind-up wheeler/dealer act could be assimilated into the movie's ***milieu***. As it is, however, Lex remains an alien element within the flow, a campy refugee from the ***BATMAN*** TV show of the 1960s—both impossible to take seriously, and an impediment to the audience's involvement with the other aspects of the plot.


...BECAUSE I FIRST WANT TO PROVE THAT MY ENLARGER CAN TURN ANY HARMLESS LITTLE OBJECT INTO A GIGANTIC MENACE! THEN I'LL DEMAND THAT THE WORLD MAKE ME ITS RULER!
BUT THEY'LL FIGHT YOU... AND SO WILL SUPERMAN!
THEN I'LL RECRUIT AN ARMY OF CRIMINALS... TURN THEM INTO GIANTS, AND MARCH ON EVERY CAPITAL OF THE WORLD!
©1982 DC Comics

Lex Luthor in the comics evinces real menace, as opposed to Gene Hackman's "wind-up wheeler/dealer act" in the movie.

Luckily, the plot is almost strong enough to overcome Luthor's presence, and the bald prankster's role in ***II***'s chain of events is almost small enough for him to be cut out of it altogether. The Phantom Zone villains terrorize astronauts, some Houston natives, and the President of the United States. Lois discovers Clark's secret identity as Superman, and he decides to give up his super-powers to engage in a "meaningful relationship" with her. Clark discovers that, in effect, Superman is still needed, gets his powers back, and defeats the villains. Simple, direct, powerful, and satisfying.

Then the ending spoils it. Clark and Lois argue about the conflict between their love for each other and his responsibilities as Superman. They kiss. She spontaneously and inexplicably forgets his identity. Everything's peachy.

The hell it is! First, simple story-telling rules would dictate that one's characters shouldn't do anything—especially a ***crucial*** anything—without some explanation, explicit or implicit. There is ***no*** explanation in ***SUPERMAN II*** for how Clark caused Lois to forget his identity by kissing her. Second, that ending frees the principals from a series of very real (from the situations postulated in the movie) problems through improbable and irresponsible machinations. Lois' and Clark's relationship had progressed to a certain level, and when more progress was called for, it regressed instead. I was reminded of the old Mort Weisinger ***"Superman"*** comics in which any situation could occur, as long as by the last page, everything was back to the way it was on page one. Such enforced stasis was vaguely disquieting then, and it's quite frustrating in ***SUPERMAN II***. Third, Lois is put into the position of being, well, manipulated to say the least. Who is Clark to decide that Lois will be much happier "with certain sections of her brain tampered with"? Has Clark been seeing Moondragon on the side? Fourth, it's damn silly, and spoiled the movie for me. I rather wish I'd walked out early and sustained the generally good impression I had of ***SUPERMAN II***. Ah, well, it would still have had the same ending, whether I saw it or not, and self-enforced ignorance is no answer to the problems of ***SUPERMAN II***. A better script is—or would have been. A script which would have justified Supie's decision to give up his powers (and ditched Lex and the cop-out ending) would have aided ***SUPERMAN II*** immensely.

How tough can it be to buy a screenplay without unsettling alien elements (like Lex), which doesn't cheat the viewer (as does Lois' spontaneous selective amnesia), and squarely faces the issues which it raises (like the conflict between a Superman's personal license and public responsibility)? I'd settle for fewer stars or special effects and a tighter script. Let's see if they can do better next time.

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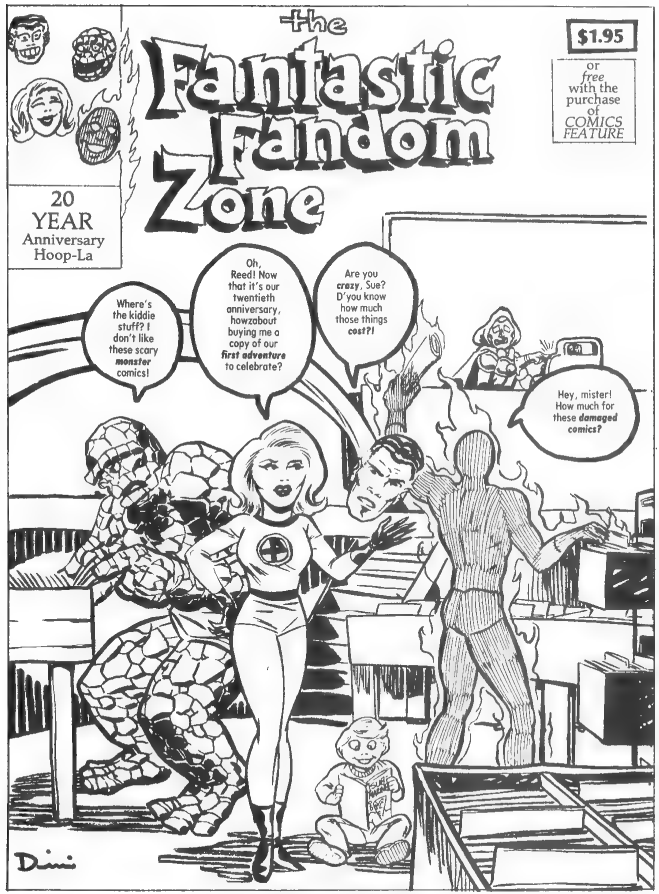
the
Fantastic Fandom Zone
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20 YEAR Anniversary Hoop-La
Where's the kiddie stuff? I don't like these scary monster comics!
Oh, Reed! Now that it's our twentieth anniversary, howzabout buying me a copy of our first adventure to celebrate?
Are you crazy, Sue? D'you know how much those things cost?!
Hey, mister! How much for these damaged comics?
Dini

character ™ & © 1981 Marvel Comics Group

Fandom Almanac

COMICS CLUBS

Easley, SC. THE COLLECTORS CLUB. Monthly newsletter published. Membership: $5.00/year (includes 12 issues of newsletter). For info, contact: Steve Haynie, Rt. #6, Easley, SC 29640.

Fullerton, CA. WEST COAST COMICS CLUB. Meets at Fullerton Science Lecture Hall, #121, California State University, 7:00 p.m. Contact: Barry Short, 420 West 4th Street, San Dimas, CA 91773 (714) 599-2488.

Maplewood, N.J. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00-9:00 p.m. Contact: Comic Club Maplewood, P.O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Mt. Prospect, IL. PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Prospect High School, Room 130, 801 W. Kensington Rd., every Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. Contact: R. Marr.

Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Ken Gorman or Mike Berthiaume, P.O. Box 11336 Postal Station H, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2H5Z0.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality Inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Ken Strack, N. 22nd St., Phoenix, AZ 85018 (602) 992-3323.

Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eddie's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

Rochester, NY. COMIC BOOK PEN PAL CLUB. Newsletter published. For info, contact: The Comic Book Man, 135 Glen Ellyn Way, Rochester, NY 14618.

St. Louis, MO. SPECTOR COMICS CLUB. Meets at Century Bowl, 7508 Michigan, 1:00-4:00 p.m. Contact: Anthony Gladish, 3917 Ohio Street, St. Louis, MO 63118.

Urbana, IL. CHAMPAIGN-URBANA COMIC CLUB. Meets at the Illinois Union Building, Room 215, 712 W. Illinois, Urbana, every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Contact: Mel DeSart.

Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions. (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X1A8.

COMICS CONVENTIONS

Sept. 11-13. Capper Con. Howard Johnson's Caravan Inn, 3333 E. Van Buren, Phoenix, Az. Guests: Marion Zimmer Bradley, Bruce M. Dane. Admisson is $12.50 for all three days.

Nov. 27-29. Creation Con. New York Statler Hotel, Manhattan, N.Y. Art Displays, Costume Parade, Panels, and Guests. For more information contact: Creation, 421 7th Ave, Suite 908, NY, NY. 10001.

Dec. 26-30. Comic Book & Sport Card Show. Chapel Hill Mall, Akron, OH. For more information contact: Bob Bosnyak, 1030 Kling St., Akron, OH 44301.

May 14-16, 1982. Leprecon 8. Caravan Inn, 3333 E. Van Buren St, Phoenix, AZ, 85008. Guests include George Barr and William Rotsler. Activities include Wargaming, Panels, Masquerade, and Films. Memberships are $8.00 in advance. For more information contact: Leprecon 8, P.O. Box 14590, Phoenix, AZ 85063.

July 2-5, 1982. Westercon-35. The Adams Hilton, Central & Adams, Phoenix, AZ. Guests include Gordon Dickson and David Gerrold. Memberships are $15.00 in advance. For more information contact: Westercon-35, P.O. Box 11644, Phoenix, AZ. 85061.

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THIS IS A SURPRISE FOR ALL OF YOU! BECAUSE OF YOUR EXCELLENT RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST THE FOES YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED, IT'S TIME YOU ALL WENT TO A COMICS CONVENTION.
OH! HOW WONDERFUL!
I'LL BE OUR FIRST ONE IN YEARS!
WOWBEE PROFESSOR! YOU JUST SAID THE MAGIC WORD!
SAY IT AGAIN! IT'S LIKE A SYMPHONY!
I'LL BE GOOD FOR ALL OF US, SIR! WE HAVE BEEN ON THE GO FOR MONTHS!

FANDOM ORIGINS

HOLY HEART ATTACK!!

By Don and Maggie Thompson

[Note: As this column progresses, more and more readers will find that we're discussing a time they remember vividly. If fifteen years ago meant the discovery of comics fandom to you, how about writing ***COMICS FEATURE*** about ***your*** impressions of comics fandom at that time? Or you can write directly to us, ***Don and Maggie Thompson, 8786 Hendricks Road, Mentor, Ohio 44060***. We'll be glad to add your illuminations to this column.]

The title for this installment probably gives you a clue about the event that hit the world of comics hardest in 1966. (There were other things of interest to fandom; we'll get to them in good time.) On January 12, the first installment of the half-hour ABC-TV show ***BATMAN*** was broadcast. Comics ***really*** attracted popular attention at last.

Most fans weren't crazy about the idea.

Consider. The previous year, comics fans had been written about in terms that showed us to be strange at best. (Strange we may have been, but at least we were strange in anonymity until 1965.) ***BATMAN*** was enormously popular and at the same time showed the public at large that comics were a riot of campy humor, worth only a hearty laugh at best.

BATMAN ran initially as a two-part serial; each Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. EST (which was prime-time then), the first part would be shown, ending in a cliffhanger. Each Thursday at 7:30 p.m., the second part would resolve the problem. The show was sort of a take-off on comics and on movie serials of the 1940s—and the humor was pie-smackingly broad. Fights had superimposed "POW!," "BANG!," "CRASH!" titles; cornball lines were delivered with wooden seriousness; and villains were played for laughs.

It was all a tremendous success. "Camp" became inescapable in movies and TV. Ratings were extremely high. And fans of the show caused a national scandal you'll still find in analyses of the insensitivity of television audiences.

There were problems with a Gemini spaceflight which led to an emergency spleshdown; word of the problems led ABC to break into the broadcast of ***BATMAN***, then in its first run and easily taking its time slot. Calls of protest at the interruption of the show flooded ABC stations, an event which was reported in outraged terms the next day. How ***could*** the Am-

erican people prefer a silly comics-character to the real-life drama occurring at the same time?

We were there and watching the broadcast, and we'd like to set the record straight on that. What happened was that the network newsmen had enough information from NASA to fill a two-minute announcement—and no more. What ABC did was run a minute or so of ***BATMAN*** and then interrupt for an emergency bulletin in which newsreaders said at great length that they didn't know what was going on. Then, they'd return to the show for a minute or so of program, go to commercials, return to the show for about another minute, and throw on another emergency bulletin in which the newsreaders repeated what they'd already said. Infuriated viewers noted that (1) no new information was provided, (2) no commercials were interrupted, (3) interruptions were clumsily padded in a pretense to knowledge, and (4) to present this foul-up the network was messing up a serial installment the network had no intention of rebroadcasting right away. If ABC had handled the matter by announcing pre-emption of that episode and showing it at a later date, viewer reaction would have been far less vehement. Certainly, ours would have been. We had no objection to the bulletin, just to the inept fashion in which it was handled.

In any case, ***BATMAN*** was enormously popular, and licensing flourished. The theme as played by The Marketts hit #17 on ***BILLBOARD***'s national hit parade—and #35, as played by Neal Hefti and his orchestra. The show did very, very well—for a short time.

Don once got to talk with Burgess Meredith (who played The Penguin and loved it) about the pervasiveness of the program. Meredith was enthusiastic because his kids enjoyed watching the show; he had a "long nose, low crotch, and magic umbrella," and his kids watched regularly. There was a drink called "The Penguin" (five parts vermouth to one part gin—blech) and even a record by that title. ("A bunch of girls sing, 'He's The Penguin, The Penguin,'" said Meredith, "and I go 'hwak, hwak, hwak.' If there's an easier way to make a buck, I'd like to hear about it.")

Popularity of comics-oriented material was such that there was a Broadway show of ***SUPERMAN*** (which came and went faster than a speeding bullet) and a comedy show off-Broadway titled ***THE MAD SHOW*** (which was more durable and starred such people as Paul Sands, Richard Libertini, and Jo Anne Worley—and was ***enormous*** fun). And the ***MODESTY BLAISE*** movie had the distinction of being quite possibly the very worst adaptation of the very best adventure strip in some time.

DC
BATMAN
COMICS CODE
12¢
HOT-LINE CALL, BATMAN! LET'S GET GOING!
NOT TONIGHT, KID! I'M STAYING IN THE BATCAVE TO WATCH MYSELF ON TELEVISION!
THE ADVENTURES OF BAT-MAN
HOLY EMERGENCY! WHAT'S THE REASON GOOFING OFF?
THE TELLTALE CLUE IS ON THIS COVER!

A typical *BATMAN* cover [illegible] show. Fortunately, the gimmicky and frequently absurd cover ideas were not necessarily a true reflection of the stories.

Many critics were surprised that a show which averaged in Nielsen's top ten for the year (both installments, Part I at 24.7% of all TV-equipped homes and Part II at 27.0%) should flop miserably in its second season and fold after about two years. You probably won't find this tidbit suggested anywhere else, either, but we were there for this event, too, and we noticed one sad thing about ***BATMAN***: It didn't reward repeated viewing. Its

first time out was so successful that the network reran it to death in the Summer of 1966. If it had been shown once and then pulled until fall, hunger for the format might have led to continued good showings. But we'll never know, will we?

But this is a column on comics; did the TV show affect them?

Circulation departments would have said yes. DC had looked on ***BATMAN*** as a shaky title and had spoken of cancelling it. Then, Julius Schwartz became editor and the TV show came along; all of a sudden, circulation soared. The title became DC's best seller, and great effort was made to tie the comic into the TV show's popularity. Stories became campier, pop-art was emphasized, and DC even put "Go-Go Checks" on its covers to show how swinging the line was. (How swinging was DC? A headline on an ad for the DC teen-humor comics read, "Happy! Hilarious! Hep!" You figure it out.)

The general populace didn't mind. We were in a newsstand at one point shortly after the inception of the show and overheard a child of about ten exclaim, "I didn't know they had a ***comic book*** about Batman!"

Sigh...

BATMAN's sales were incredible, peaking at a stated average paid circulation of 898,470 and leading the industry at that point. Unfortunately, the figures were tightly tied to the program's popularity. The next year they would go to 805,200 and continue to fall after that. You can see how ***BATMAN*** fit into a list of some other comics' circulation for 1966:

408,219 ***JUSTICE LEAGUE***
346,250 ***WALT DISNEY'S COMICS & STORIES***
338,052 ***TARZAN***
297,516 ***UNCLE SCROOGE***
296,251 ***THOR***
279,406 ***BRAVE & BOLD***
261,069 ***STRANGE TALES***
256,145 ***TALES TO ASTONISH***
252,239 ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***
232,850 ***ATOM***
190,515 ***SUGAR & SPIKE***

(We won't go into an extensive essay on comics circulations as stated for second-class mailing privileges; suffice it to note that we have always found them an excellent guide to the health of industry titles, as long as only the average paid circulation figures are used.)

You can see that ***BATMAN***'s circulation was absolutely incredible for the industry at that point. However, fan enthusiasm for the comic was not so enthusiastic, as you can see from the fan award voting for 1966.

Alley Awards
FOR 1965

I. BEST COMIC MAGAZINE SECTION

1. Best Adventure Book with the Main Character in the Title: ***SPIDER-MAN*** (390)
2. Best Multi-Feature Title: ***TALES OF SUSPENSE*** (570)
3. Best Super Hero Group Title: ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** (607)
4. Best Normal Group Adventure Title: ***MARS PATROL*** (371)
5. Best Fantasy/SF/Supernatural Title: ***STRANGE ADVENTURES*** (291)
6. Best Western Title: ***KID COLT*** (267)
7. Best War Title: ***SGT. FURY & HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS*** (366)
8. Humor Titles A. Teenage: ***ARCHIE*** (235)
   B. Costumed: ***INFERIOR FIVE*** (426)
   C. Juvenile: ***UNCLE SCROOGE*** (325)
9. Best All-Reprint Title: ***SPIRIT*** (544)
10. Best Combination New & Old Material Title: ***FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL*** (460)

II. BEST PROFESSIONAL WORK

1. Best Editor: Stan Lee (488)
2. Best Writer: Stan Lee (554)
3. Best Pencil Work: Al Williamson (469)
4. Best Inking Work: Wally Wood (463)
5. Best Cover: ***FLASH GORDON #1*** (353)
6. Best Coloring: ***FLASH GORDON*** (361)
7. Best Full-Length Story: ***"How Green Was My Goblin"*** **(*SPIDER-MAN #39*)** (369)
8. Best Feature Story: ***"Return to Mongo"*** **(*FLASH GORDON #1*)** (422)
9. Best Regular Short Feature: ***"Tales of Asgard"*** in ***THOR*** (431)
10. Hall of Fame: Never reported

IV. NEWSPAPER STRIP SECTION*

1. Best Adventure Strip: ***THE PHANTOM*** (396)
2. Best Human Interest Strip: ***ON STAGE*** (372)
3. Best Humor Strip: ***PEANUTS*** (465)
4. Best Humor Panel: ***DENNIS THE MENACE*** (308)
5. Best Miscellaneous Strip: ***JULES FEIFFER*** (312)
6. Hall of Fame Award: Alex Raymond's ***FLASH GORDON*** (419)
7. Best All-Time Great Comic Strip: ***FLASH GORDON*** (331)

* note: Section III, the "popularity poll," was never reported.

V. FAN ACTIVITY SECTION

1. Best All Article Fanzine: TIE—***BATMANIA & TNT/SLAM BANG*** (221)
2. Best All Comic Fanzine: ***ODD*** (178)
3: Best All Fiction Fanzine: ***BATWING*** (176)
4. Best Article/Comic Zine: ***FANTASY ILLUSTRATED*** (332)
5. Best Fiction/Comic Zine: ***COMIC ART*** (115)
7. Best Fannish One-Shot: The ***"Spirit"*** Reprints (Ed Aprill) (150)
8. Best Article on Comic Book Material: ***"Quality Comics Group"*** (191)
9. Best Article on Newspaper Strips: ***"Pride of the Navy"*** (152)
10. Best Regular Fan Column: ***"What's News"*** (369)
11. Best Fan Fiction: ***"White Dragon Strikes"*** (224)
12. Best Fan Comic Strip: ***"Xal-Kor"*** (150)
13. Best Fan Artist: Grass Green (165)
14. Best Comic Strip Writer: Richard Green (146)
15. Best Fan Project: Aprill's Reprints (248)
16. Best Newsletter: ***DATELINE: COMICDOM*** (113)

Fandom Zone

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU SAID... ABOUT MY FATHER ...
YOU MUSTN'T WORRY ABOUT HIM, SU SAN. THE BIG CITIES ARE ALWAYS READY FOR THE UNUSUAL ON A HIGH LEVEL OF ART...
...AND THERE ARE LARGE CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN AMERICA, IN SAN FRANCISCO ALONE...
I KNOW—ACTUALLY, I WAS FEELING A BIT GUILTY. ALL THIS TROUBLE ... AND IT'S THE MOST FUN I'VE EVER HAD IN MY LIFE!
MEANWHILE...
ANOTHER ONE? WHAT'S COME OVER MY IRREGULAR CORRESPONDENT?
... THERE'S A LETTER FROM PETE, HONEY!

Leonard Starr's *ON STAGE*, 1965's "best human interest strip."

Possibly in an attempt to provide a ***broad*** picture of fans' opinions, Dave Kaler expanded the number of categories voted upon from twenty-nine to fifty-six when he took over the Alley Awards. A nominating panel was instructed to list ten nominees for such categories as "Best adventure hero not in costume or powered" and five nominees for such categories as "Best adventure hero title featuring one or more characters in strips bearing their name or other material in the book whether hero-orientated or not." Some of the results were printed in ***ON THE DRAWING BOARD #62-63*** (Aug-Nov 1967); the rest never appeared. Numbers given for each winner were apparently based on points ratings and not on the number of people voting.

You'll note that, whereas Batman was taking the rest of America by storm and DC was basking in its circulation figures, only ***STRANGE ADVENTURES*** and ***INFERIOR FIVE*** got DC any winners in the fan voting.

1966 was a full year, indeed, for comics fans. Jerry Bails gave up his post as Central Mailer of the first comics apa, CAPA-alpha. (We took the job.) You'll note that Ed Aprill's reprints got nods from the voting fans; he made the first major fan effort to collect daily strip sequences into a convenient magazine format. His were pioneering efforts of love, and his death in an auto accident a few years later hit comics fandom hard. He was responsible for collections of almost-impossible-to-get dailies of such strips strips as ***BUCK ROGERS, SPIRIT,*** and ***JOHNNY COMET.***

1966 also saw two comics cons in New York City; we didn't get to attend the December one put on by Dave Kaler, but we did make it to John Benson's July 23-24 gathering (with Jack Kirby as guest of honor and with film shows by Chris Steinbrunner). In fact, there were other comics cons beginning to proliferate; 1966 brought cons in Dallas and St. Louis and even comics programming in such non-comics cons as the World SF Con (in Cleveland that year). Our coverage of these events included the news that "a new teen-age artist, Joe [sic] Steranko, will do ***AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.***"

Benson's convention was well-programmed and offered such meaty fare as a debate on the Comics Code between Leonard Darvin and Don, a discussion of his own work by Jack Kirby, and a panel of pro editors who answered fan questions. Paul Krassner (editor of the underground newspaper of the day, ***THE REALIST***) reported on the convention in ***CAVALIER*** for November 1966 (***"The Funny Book Fanatics"***); it was one of the best of the early reports on comics fans, since Krassner was himself deeply interested in comics art.

NEXT MONTH: Endings and Beginnings

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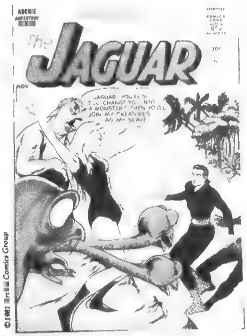

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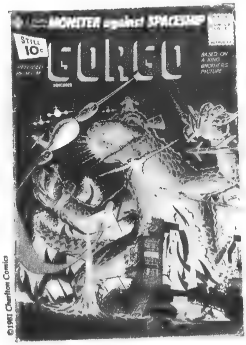

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GILBERTON PUBLISHING

by Chuck Wooley

Gilberton Publishing, widely known for their *"Classics Illustrated"* series, occupy a rare position in comics collecting annals--both in terms of their peculiar distribution policies and the type of material they issued.

Although Gilberton was the first to build a company by transmuting the classic works of Western literature into comic books they were not the first to experiment with the idea. In fact, Gilberton merely expanded the techniques and format apparently pioneered by Malcom Wheeler-Nicholson's National Allied Newspaper Syndicate, Inc.

Classics of literature were being published in comics at least as early as December 1935, when ***NEW COMICS*** **#1** was issued. National Allied Syndicate, Inc. (more commonly known today as National or DC) was publishing classics of literature in the comic book pages. The centerfold of ***NEW COMICS*** **#1** and **#2**, in fact, comprised an adaptation of Swift's ***GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*** (done by no less a personage than Walt Kelly). ***NEW COMICS*** **#4** began a major adaptation of Dickens' ***A TALE OF TWO CITIES*** (signed and illustrated by Merna Gamble), and ***NEW COMICS*** **#5** (dated June 1936) saw the debut of Henry Carl Kiefer's ***"Famous Poems Illustrated"*** series, as well as a feature (also apparently by Kiefer) entitled ***"Myths of Gods and Men."*** ***NEW COMICS*** **#6** began Sven Elven's major serial adaptation of H. Rider Haggard's ***SHE***, and the above lineup clearly illustrates Wheeler-Nicholson's commitment to the adaptation of classic works of literature to the comic book pages. Further, much of the work was being done by Henry Carl Kiefer, one of the workhorses of Gilberton's yet-to-be-developed comic book line.

Gilberton's first comic book was ***CLASSICS COMICS*** **#1**, ***THE THREE MUSKETEERS***, published in 1941. It was quickly followed by ***IVANHOE, THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO, THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS, MOBY DICK, A TALE OF TWO CITIES, ROBIN HOOD, THE ARABIAN NIGHTS, LES MISERABLES,*** and ***ROBINSON CRUSOE*** (in that order). Approximately concurrent with issue #10, however, a major decision (insofar as the comic publishing world is concerned) was made, and the first of the ***CLASSIC COMICS*** reprints was issued.

This decision, more than any other, set the tone for the remainder of Gilberton's commercial life. It made Gilberton the first comic company to consistently reprint and remarket its comics over a period of many years.

Although this attitude of consistently

A scene from the first *CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED* comic, *THE THREE MUSKETEERS*. Art by George Evans.

All illustrations for this article are ©1981 Gilberton Publishing

The "Action-Adventure-Detective" formula cover as applied to Gilberton's *ROMEO AND JULIET*, cover-featuring the sword-fight.

reprinting and again marketing its best-selling publications was hardly original with Gilberton (Biblical printers had been doing this for centuries), Gilberton was nonetheless the only comics company to do this in any type of significant way (while Gilberton was publishing). The hundreds of other comics publishers felt that their road to success was rooted in the issuance of new, never-before-published material.

Although Gilberton's decision to reprint its ***CLASSICS*** was a logical one which replicated the marketing technique of the works that Gilberton was adapting, their decision resulted in a relatively minuscule outpouring of new material from so major a publisher. During the span of Gilberton's existence, they issued about 300 to 400 different comics (not counting variations caused by criticism or a shrinking per-issue page count). During the exact same time period, DC/National, Timely/Atlas/Marvel, and Dell each issued thousands of different comic books. If one considers each separate reprinting as a different comic, however, then Gilberton issued in the neighborhood of 1,500 comics.

Although many collectors would doubtlessly have preferred that Gilberton not reprint its books, and that they would instead have issued all new material, one must admit that the management side of the company was greatly simplified by its reliance upon reprints. After all, it is far simpler to reprint a comic book than it is to produce it from a novel.

Back in 1943, however, when the first of the reprints was issued, Gilberton must have been primarily concerned with maintaining or increasing their basic market share. For, even though Gilberton was clearly interested in expanding the audience of classic works of Western literature, they were adhering to the basic "Action-Adventure-Detective" formula that was selling tens of millions of comics during World War II. Any examination of the original editions of ***CLASSIC COMICS'*** covers clearly shows that Gilberton's editors believed that action, adventure, violence, fantasy, romance, and suspense sold comics. For example, ***THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS*** (#4) portrays dramatic action; ***MOBY DICK*** (#5), ***THE ADVENTURES OF MARCO POLO*** (#27), and ***MYSTERIOUS ISLAND*** (#34) portray high adventure; ***WESTWARD HO!*** (#14), ***UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*** (#15), ***THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*** (#18), ***THREE FAMOUS MYSTERIES***, including ***"The Flayed Hand"*** (#21), ***FRANKENSTEIN*** (#26), and ***THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES*** (#33) are all explicitly or implicitly violent; ***THE ARABIAN NIGHTS*** (#8) and ***THE MOONSTONE*** (#30) are great works of fantasy; Matt Baker's ***LORNA DOONE*** (#32) is filled with romance; and ***THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER*** (#29) is about as suspenseful as a comics cover can get. Throughout World War II, these themes sold well for Gilberton.

By 1947, however, the critics of comic books were gaining a wider audience, and as ***CLASSIC COMICS*** changed their title to ***CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED***, Gilberton found itself taking more than its fair share of abuse. Many educators were outraged to discover that some children were reading the ***CLASSIC COMICS*** instead of the novels, and critics like Wertham were gearing up to intensely criticize the violence which was portrayed in the comics (apparently the violence was fine if left in the novels).

Naturally, different comic publishers reacted to this criticism in different ways. EC comics became far more violent and gory in the early 1950s than they had been in the late 1940s. Gilberton, however, did their best to appease their critics, by either removing the offensive elements (such as the changed cover for ***TWENTY YEARS AFTER*** (#41), or by simply refusing to continue to reprint the comic (***GREAT EXPECTATIONS***, #43, had only one reprinting, compared to more than twenty reprintings of early best sellers like ***THE THREE MUSKETEERS***).

Although Gilberton did excise much of the realistic violence from their comics in order to appease their critics—particularly on their covers—they still retained more than most collectors realize. Even a fairly innocuous appearing title like ***KING—OF THE KHYBER RIFLES*** (#107), dated May of 1953, contains elements like a severed human head being displayed to a crowd. ("Hold it by the ears, for the hair is short!")

A particularly excellent series of reprints was also issued in the late 1940s. Most ***CLASSICS*** collectors define editions by noting the largest number on the back issue order form which virtually all ***CLASSICS*** contained (commonly known as the HRN, for "Highest Reorder Number"). Those which were issued with HRN's of 60, 62, and 64 are usually quite striking in their printed appearance. The quality of their printing is extraordinary, in fact, and collectors who like the printed quality of the line-drawn covers with HRN's between 110 and 129 would do well to in-

Artwork by George Evans in *THE LITTLE SAVAGE*

The Classics Illustrated *"Special Edition"* and *"World Around Us"* volumes. In the center is a Jack Kirby feature from *"SPIES."*

vestigate these much earlier and scarcer issues.

The next major development at Gilberton occurred about March of 1951, when ***THE ODYSSEY*** **(#81)** was issued with a painted cover. Prior to this time, all of the Classics had been issued with line-drawn covers. (The difference between the two types of covers is fairly dramatic to behold. A line-drawn cover looks like a normal comics cover, as at least 98% of all comic covers are drawn with pen and/or brush with ink, like the interior of a comic book. This black and white drawing of lines on paper then has color overlays added to it, so that it can be printed in color. A painted cover, however, does not normally have any lines on it, as it is not drawn with ink but rather with a brush and with paint. Most Marvel and Warren ***magazine*** covers are presently painted, while most ***comic book*** covers are presently line-drawn.)

Most collectors today prefer the line-drawn covers, which were generally very well drafted, and free from distracting blurbs. (A blurb is a piece of text which is placed over the drawn comic cover. It can be considered hyperbole (or worse), and generally states something like "best issue ever.") Most of the painted covers were also well done, however, and seem to become increasingly desirable as collectors become used to their different appearance.

The interior art on the ***CLASSICS*** was also noteworthy, and generally much better than in most other comics. Many excellent artists worked on the ***CLASSICS*** over the decades, and although the quality of their work might vary from issue to issue, in many instances it is superb.

Aside from the aforementioned H. C. Kiefer and Matt Baker, the following artists all made noteworthy contributions to the publications of Gilberton: Louis Zansky, Rolland H. Livingstone, Robert Webb, Arnold Hicks, Allen Simon, Homer Fleming, Ezra Whiteman, Rudolph Palais, Alex Blum, Jack Kirby, L. B. Cole, Al Williamson, George Evans, Graham Ingels, Gray Morrow, Everett Kinstler, Joe Orlando, and Reed Crandall. As this list of artists demonstrates, the quality of their publications was obviously a major concern to Gilberton.

The 1950s was a good decade for Gilberton. Their ***CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED*** series was coming out on a monthly basis during the early 1950s (in the middle 1950s the series was shifted to bi-monthly frequency), and they saw fit to establish three other major comic series. The first, which debuted in 1953, was a logical reaction to an increasing market and to criticisms of violence. Known as the ***CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED JUNIOR*** comics, this new series was based upon folk and fairy tales. Somewhat scarce today, these comics were published until Gilberton's final year, 1971. Clearly aimed at a very young audience, this series is not considered to be very desirable by today's collectors.

About two years after the ***CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED JUNIOR*** comics first saw print, Gilberton premiered their ***CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED SPECIAL ISSUE*** editions. These 100 page comics were issued on a more or less semi-annual basis. They were drawn by popular artists, including Kirby, Williamson, Crandall, Evans, Morrow, Torres and Ingels, and were centered about certain themes. ***THE STORY OF JESUS, THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE ATOMIC AGE, ROCKETS, JETS, AND MISSILES, THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES, WORLD WAR II, THE PREHISTORIC WORLD,*** and ***THE UNITED NATIONS*** are examples of these themes which are highly sought after by collectors today.

Gilberton's last major series was entitled ***THE WORLD AROUND US***, and it first appeared on newsstands in mid-1958. Like the ***SPECIAL EDITION*** series, it also featured artwork by fan favorites, and it likewise dealt with one theme per issue. ***THE WORLD AROUND US*** series was less ambitious than the ***SPECIAL EDITION*** series, though, and various issues were centered around themes like Dogs, Indians, Horses, Pirates, Jungles, and Undersea Adventure. The page count of this series was about mid-way between that of the ***SPECIAL EDITION*** comics and the ***CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED***.

As the tumultuous (from the comics publishers' vantage) 1950s closed, however, and the Marvel Age of Comics began, Gilberton's fortunes waned. Their ***WORLD AROUND US*** series folded in 1961, the same year that saw the debut of the ***FANTASTIC FOUR***. Their ***SPECIAL EDITION*** series last saw print in 1963. It was as if the paranoia of the 1950s had spurred the sales of the relatively "safe" ***CLASSICS***, but the relevance-seeking 1960s suppressed them.

The ***CLASSICS*** continued to see publication until about 1971, however, at which point the company was laid to rest. The comic book readers' tastes had changed, apparently, and the comic book market had dwindled. Our culture was continuing to evolve, and as it did so the ***CLASSICS*** of an earlier era became less compelling. Readers wanted contemporary works that dealt with contemporary concerns. From the comics collector's point of view, however, the ***CLASSICS*** form a remarkable—and highly desirable—branch of comics collecting.

THE FIRST TASTE OF *CHERRIES JUBILEE*

"I had 'retired' because of boredom with these tricks. (It) is not different from ice cream; to partake every day makes it distasteful, no matter how much others may yearn for it. Now **they** begin to love ice cream, while I dine on... cherries jubilee!"
—**Wolf Messing, to Max August, from THE POINT MAN**

by Markalan Joplin

His jaw is set and his lips form a thin, grim line of determination as he rises in the plexiglass-walled elevator to the fifteenth floor of the Hyatt Regency. The doors slide open silently, and he stalks down the short distance of hall that leads to her hotel room. Outside the door, he stops. He takes a deep, calming breath before opening the door.

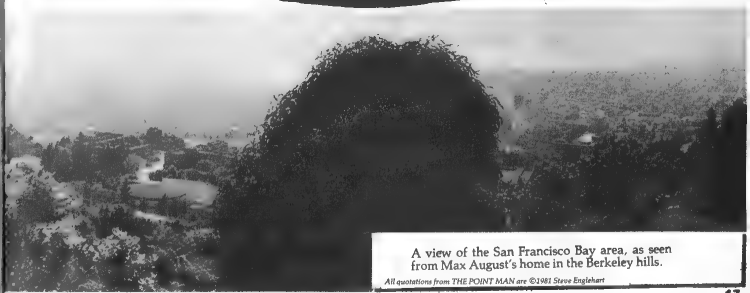
The woman inside that room is his boss. She is also his lover.

And the evidence he's gathered says that she has stolen his most prized possession and replaced it with an imperfect duplicate.

There is anger, there is nervousness—but there is also serenity as well. If it means the end of his job, he's prepared to accept it. At least, one way or the other, there will be an end to the mystery. He is on firm footing again, no longer flailing helplessly in the quicksand. He grasps the doorknob...

...and the door slams inward as an elemental vortex sucks him into the room.

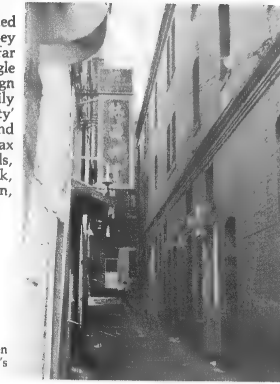
Gales of fetid wind scream around him; he smells the crackling ozone of lightning, followed by the sickly-sweet smell of his own charred flesh as it strikes his hand. The room



A view of the San Francisco Bay area, as seen from Max August's home in the Berkeley hills.

All quotations from THE POINT MAN are ©1981 Steve Englehart

"...they turned again, into an alley which snaked far back toward a single dim light. A sign read 'Lim Family Benevolent Society' in small English and large Chinese. Max flexed his hands, stretched his back, wished he had a gun, and entered."



One of the many hidden alleys in San Francisco's Chinatown.

is dominated by a gray-black, nebulous—***storm cloud!*** A storm cloud with dozens of living, malevolent eyes which track his movements and revel in his fear.

He regains his footing and tries to get out, but the cloud anticipates his movement and a sudden gust of wind blows the door shut, trapping him in the darkened room illuminated only by flashes of lightning and the cold glow of the wetching eyes. A bolt lashes out, and the TV tube implodes in a spray of glass, followed by a larger explosion of sparks and circuitry.

In desperation, he flings a copper ashtray at it; it sparks, but it does not die. Howling winds force him down on the charred carpeting, and then the storm cloud is on all sides of him at once, shrieking like a million children being crushed to death in a blue-hot stamp press before metamorphosizing into the voice of the woman he loved. And as he is conducted into oblivion, he hears her gleefully shout: ***"So long, sucker!"***

*

There are comics. And there are novels.

Each is different from the other.

I'm sure that comes as no great surprise to the majority of you. But it *is* a truism which has escaped the notice of those comic book writers now taking their first hesitant steps into the previously-unexplored field of novels.

Unlike comics, which increase on a more-or-less linear basis—the story merely gets longer, i.e., throwing in another fight or another page of Spider-Man doing his "Eli, Eli" scene over his personal life—novels increase ***geometrically***: if it is so much longer than a comic book, it must also be that much ***wider*** than a comic book. The plot has to be that much more complex, and the climax has to be that much more spectacular. Nothing less than that will hold the reader's interest over the course of some 300-or-so pages.

Then there's the matter of characterization and characters. With comics, as with television (and now, apparently, movies), the writer is limited in what he or she can achieve with any assigned character by the very nature of the medium itself, which requires the character to be back next week, or next month, hale and hearty and pretty much unchanged from the last episode. Characters in novels, on the other hand, have a high mortality rate; with the exception of the established "series" characters (mostly in the mystery and SF fields), the characters, if the writers have done their jobs right, will have been used up. They may still be alive and sane at the end of the book (usually, they are), but they will have gone through their ultimate conflict during the course of the book, and all future conflicts should be anticlimactic in comparison.

It takes a lot of un-learning of old skills, replaced by the learning of new ones, for a comic book writer to successfully carry all this off.

And these are only the two most ***obvious*** differences.

There is a great deal of freedom in novels. They are one-shot affairs, rather than continuing concerns, which gives the writer the power to carry the story to whatever extreme he or she chooses. They have a lower "break-even" point as opposed to comics—it's easier to turn a profit with books, because the publishers don't have to sell as high a percentage of the print run as the comic book publishers do. This lower break-even point allows special interest books and other marginal enterprises to be published; packaging and promotional campaigns are simply altered to accomodate the smaller-run books. Comics, on the other hand, have a set percentage of copies which must be sold of ***each*** title; marginal titles such as Jim Starlin's ***WARLOCK*** or Steve Ditko's ***SHADE, THE CHANGING MAN*** must sell the same base percentage of their press-run as ***SPIDER-MAN*** and the ***LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES*** sell of theirs.

Freed from this restriction, the novelist enjoys the power this offers. He or she can carry off the most far-fetched idea imaginable, knowing that ***somewhere*** out there is an audience thirsting for just that kind of story. And in cases such as Robert Anton Wilson's ***ILLUMINATI*** books, the audience can sometimes be larger than anyone had expected.

The only restriction placed on a novel is its sales potential. Novels have no moronic code of morality imposed upon them, as comics have with the Comics Code. This gives the writer the power to delineate characters and situations as he or she pleases. When a character curses, he or she can use real-life words. "Goddamned son-of-a-bitch" replaces "You unspeakable fiend!" When characters get punched in the mouth, they bleed and express their pain, instead of saying "What th-?" When two characters get horny, they go upstairs and screw.

And you can use the words "horror" and "terror" as often as you please.

But the greatest power that books offer the writer is the power over his or her creation. The novel, the plot, the characters, ***everything*** is the property of the creator. He or she owns the rights. If Warner Brothers wants to make a movie from the novel, they must negotiate with the ***creator***, the person who dreamed the original dream. All rights, including copyright, belong to the creator. No "work-made-for-hire" stipulations. No corporate middlemen taking away money which rightfully belongs to the creator. No gasps of surprise or sputters of outrage when the creator brings his or her agent or attorney into a publisher's office to negotiate a contract. Ah, luxury.

Small wonder that, with all this power available to them, comic book writers are making their own small inroads into this new, infinitely more rewarding motherlode.

But, as someone once said, "With great power comes great responsibility." With books, there is only one editor, who doesn't see the work until it's finished. Everything up until then is up to the writer. It is his or her responsibility that the story makes some sort of sense, that the characterizations which the creator set up at the beginning of the book are not flagrantly violated and that the integrity of the work as a whole remains intact. It is the creator's responsibility to not only come up with the story, but to learn ***how*** to tell it

and how to tell it in a way that will make the buying public want to read it.

Jackson Browne said it most succinctly: "If you're going to walk on thin ice, you may as well dance." To the timid, they are words of admonition; to the brave, words of challenge. But the message itself is unwavering: if one is going to go in a new direction, either go the distance or don't bother starting up in the first place.

And, as should be obvious by now, the transition from comics writer to novel writer involves one ***hell*** of a distance, which is why up to this point, few comic book writers have truly taken the plunge. The majority of these writers have opted for taking the easy way out, merely transplanting the same stock characters and situations from one media to another, as evidenced by Marvel's recent line of novels. Here, the true simplicity and skimpiness of comic book characterization is brought into glaring focus, and the novels, almost without exception, prove themselves to be simplistic, heavily padded and ultimately dull reading. The stories are still being written as if the writers are expecting pictures to be drawn at a later date, and it shows.

The only contemporary comic book writer up until now who has gone into novels to the point of actually creating his own stories and characters, is Michael Fleisher. (Gerry Conway, although he has written novels while doing comics, was a novelist first and came into comics shortly after writing ***THE MIDNIGHT DANCERS***.) All controversy over content aside, Fleisher's ***CHASING HAIRY*** is an example of a writer breaking into novels who enjoyed all the power, but ignored the responsibility. Clearly—Dwight Decker's cries for uplifting literature notwithstanding—there *is* a story to be told here; the sexual frustration which motivates both Simon Weiner and Ken Pedersen is certainly a valid base for a story. But Fleisher's narrative doesn't attend to the geometric aspect of novel storytelling. There is no true breadth or depth to the story, which, especially when dealing with such savage and bizarre characters as Fleisher creates here, leaves the reader with the impression of having walked in on the middle of a conversation, and ultimately makes for unpalatable reading. The man has talent, though, and with a little more time devoted toward learning his craft, Michael Fleisher could possibly develop into a first-class writer.

Only one writer has gone the distance. Only one man has divorced himself from comics, learned his craft, danced on the thin ice and come away from the experience new and whole. The dancer's name is Steve Englehart.

Like Wolf Messing, in the quote at the beginning of this article, Englehart had reached a point where he was bored with the "ice cream" of mainstream comics and, like others before him, cast a longing eye on the "cherries jubilee" of novels. In the interview in this issue, he says he became dissatisfied with the major companies because they were no longer the "continually viable, expanding, challenging medium" he had first signed on with in 1972. He was looking for a new medium, one which would grow as he grew, and decided on novels.

Englehart's career in comics was a brief one —five years at Marvel and an additional year with DC—but such was his talent that he remains to this day one of the most well-known and respected names in the field. He established a reputation for offbeat ideas which, surprisingly, he was always able to pull off, such as an eight-issue run of ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** in which the star of the book was nowhere to be seen, or the celebrated ***AVENGERS/DEFENDERS*** crossover during the summer of 1973. He could marry a Vietnamese prostitute to an intelligent tree, put a sorcerer's disciple in bed with Ben Franklin, blow up the world and re-create it again, and actually ***gain*** readers. With another writer, it would be the other way around.

But Englehart's major strength lay in the dormant spirit of optimism that ran through his work. Unlike other writers, whose idea of "optimism" consisted entirely of The Fantastic Four's ability to beat Doctor Doom once again, Englehart would put his characters in situations which would truly test their limits, with the character coming out of the test a better person for his or her efforts. This was truly heartening, and was responsible for greater reader identification with certain Marvel characters, The Beast being a prime example.

When Englehart created a meaning for the given name of his creation, Shang Chi, he also inadvertantly distilled the overall theme of the body of his work into a single phrase: "the rising and advancing of a spirit." In ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***, the spirit was advanced when Cap was placed in a situation which showed him for the first time how truly different things were between the America he knew and the America of today. In ***DR. STRANGE***, the Sorcerer Supreme lost his mentor and had to come to terms with both himself and his awesome responsibility; he had to learn to accept the possibility of loss, up to and including the ultimate loss—death. And in **"Viva,"** the short story he wrote for Byron Preiss' **"WEIRD HEROES"** series, a Puerto Rican hooker's spirit rises and advances when she discovers her relationship to nature on a tropical island.

THE POINT MAN too concerns itself with the rising and advancing of a spirit. It is the story of one Max August, a Vietnam vet and now the hottest DJ in San Francisco. Via his involvement with the woman who owns the station he works for, he is put in charge when the station converts over to automation, and things look like easy street for Max.

But there's a hitch. His boss/lover, Madeline Riggs by name, is actually a psychokinetic, a member of an elite group of Soviet agents with highly-developed extrasensory powers. Her mission is to gather together four unique sculptures which, in the right hands, are talismans of incredible power. She has three of them already. Guess who has the fourth. Right —Max August.

The fourth talisman—an amber lion—is stolen and replaced with an imperfect duplicate, which leaves Max totally at sea. The lion is his most prized possession, and that, coupled with his outrage over having the sanctity of his home violated, drives him to retrieve his lion and get back at the unnamed people behind its theft.

And as for what happens ***then***... read the first few paragraphs of this article.

From there, he is drawn into a web of intrigue, paranoia and sorcerous forces beyond the scope of the majority of humankind. Befriended by a superstar vocalist named Valerie Drake, and her lover, manager and personal wizard—a man known only as "Mr. Correilius"—Max's concepts of reality are first challenged, and then expanded, as he is pulled

" 'Come over here,' Max said, leading Val into an alcove... The mannequins in the store window watched with toothy smiles, nodding encouragement."

Some of the boutiques near the KQBU studios on Sutter Street.

deeper and deeper into the ultimate battle between the powers.

If this sounds a little bit like a re-hashing of Dr. Strange's origin, rest assured that such is not the case. ***THE POINT MAN*** deals with Magick in the same way that ***MOBY DICK*** deals with whaling: a device, a means to an end, rather than the ***raison d'etre*** of the story. It is first and foremost a story of characters going through a baptism of fire, and here, as in Englehart's previous work, the job is carried off with aplomb.

The characterizations, while not the deepest ever seen in literature, are far and away Englehart's most involved effort to date. At the front end of the story, the reader is presented with two distinct, almost diametrically opposed portraits of the story's protagonist, Max August: **one**, the joyously independent consciousness that was part of his first experience in Vietnam as a point man (refer to the interview, in which Englehart describes this in more detail), followed by **two**, the pragmatic, cynical, somewhat jaded DJ whom the reader is introduced to at the beginning of the tale. As the story progresses, Max's character is peeled back like layers of an onion, each layer of which is then presented to the reader for examination. We see not only how Max went from one extreme to the other, but we begin to see the two fuse together, as Max comes closer and closer to his realization of self.

The supporting characters, Valerie Drake and Dr. Corneilius, are also earmarked for special treatment. Valerie is somewhat less rounded-out than the others, due to the nature of her character: as a nationally-famous and well-respected singer, she says to Max, "I'm the wholesome Queen of Rock, always... but it only takes one small crack in the facade before the Big Expose, and a week after that, every mag and rag in the Western world will be reporting the Inside Details. Once the bubble bursts, you can't get back in again." As a result, the major emphasis on her character lies in her near-constant defensive attitude. Trust comes hard to Valerie Drake, and Max must try to deserve that trust.

And as for Mr. Corneilius... oh, he's a deep one, all right. Wise, witty, Master when the situation calls for it, servant when it doesn't. In one scene, he's a friend and confidant; in another, he's the sneakiest damn bastard that ever messed your mind over. I can't go too much into him without giving the story away, but rest assured, there's more to him than meets the eye.

In contrast, the novel's antagonists are fairly comic-esque; that is, one-dimensional. They're Soviets and they're bad, so what more do you need to know? An indication of this type of characterization can be had in the following passage from the book, a few words spoken by the Russian wizard, Wolf Messing:

> "So glad you know my name," said Messing. "So hate introductions, and other tedious chores conventions require. Oh, but do you know my wife?" He said "wife."

Ahem.

Outside of the accent and the fact that he's a bad guy, Englehart has tacked on a couple of other affectations: Wolf has a definite love for the stage and being in the spotlight, as well as a fairly stock comic book villain flaw, that of overconfidence. But these are superficial; they're just things for that character to do, rather than the genuinely motivated and real portraits of Max, Valerie or Corneilius. While Englehart, in his interview, mentioned times where he "went down the wrong road trying *not* to do a comic book type of thing," the characterization of Messing was an example of going down the wrong road doing just the opposite.

The other problems with the book are minor. Englehart has done a great deal of research for this book, and the occult is a source of great personal interest to him (again, see the interview). So it's only natural that he's going to want to show off what he knows. This is accomplished in three scenes in the book, two with the wizard Corneilius and one with the wizard Messing. All three are a little too talky, drawing out the scenes a little longer than they would normally be.

And while he focuses a lot of attention to the background of the story and the nature of Magick in general, he lets slide another area of potential. This area manifests itself in the person of an FBI agent named Hardesty, one of a group of agents who have been following the progress of the Soviet psychokinetics. Brought in early in the story, he promises to play an important part in Max's investigation, as either a hindrance or a help—or maybe a little bit of both. However, around the middle of the book, Hardesty is unceremoniously dumped in Max's back yard, and is thereafter mentioned only in passing.

If the burden of keeping track of characters and situations during the course of a 356-page superstructure caused Englehart to slip once or twice, the bulk of ***THE POINT MAN*** overall is free of such lapses. Englehart has indeed learned his craft well, and nowhere is that more evident than in his narrative. Each scene bristles with life, and every dilemma crackles with menace. Even those readers with little to no ability to fantasize (a growing number, alas) would have no problem setting up mental "movies" of key scenes throughout the book, so vivid are the descriptions of the action. For someone once so thoroughly locked into the words-and-pictures format of comics as Englehart was to carry this off so well on a first effort is a stunning achievement.

All in all, ***THE POINT MAN*** represents a clean break for Steve (now Stephen) Englehart from any ties to the past. Unlike Michael Fleisher's ***CHASING HAIRY***, this book will carry no mention of Englehart's previous work at Marvel, DC or Eclipse. He means for the work to stand on its own merits—and it does. ***THE POINT MAN*** is an almost flawless example of the magic and glory which only novels can achieve. In a glut of typeset battles with the same old Doctor Dooms and Red Skulls, it stands out in sharp bas-relief as a true original —the first ***successful*** novel written by somebody in comics. Every comic book writer who is thinking about novels should sit down and read it through.

But for now, let the ice cream eaters look on hungrily as Steve Englehart sits back, relaxes and savors his first taste of cherries jubilee.

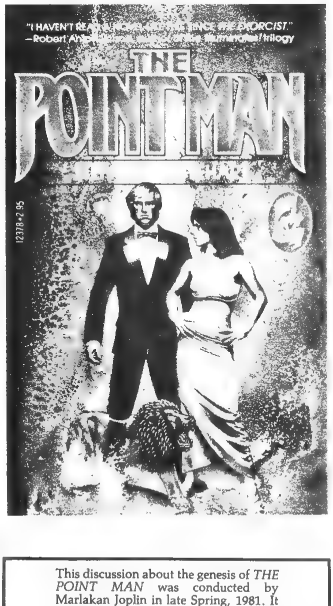
He's earned every bite.

"As he walked up Sutter Street, turining his back on the financial district, Max pondered the 'crazy business' he was in."

Sutter Street, home of radio station KQBU, where Max August works.

BEHIND The Point Man

An Interview with Steve Englehart



This discussion about the genesis of *THE POINT MAN* was conducted by Marlakan Joplin in late Spring, 1981. It was edited and approved by both Joplin and Englehart.

JOPLIN: Let's start with novel writing, as opposed to comics writing. There have been other comics writers of late who have taken their shot at novelization, but who haven't gone as far as you have in terms of divorcing themselves completely from comics. Do you think there's an advantage in the path you took?

ENGLEHART: Definitely. Yes. Before I left off from the comic side, I tried to be very rational about the whole thing. I was giving up a lucrative career at the height of my popularity. I don't think I'm crazy—I may be interested in a lot of things which are "out there" for some people, but I don't consider myself to be nuts—and there was no way that I would give up my comic book career at that time if I didn't have solid expectations of being able to start another career that would satisfy me.

Writing comic books requires a very particular head space. I see this much more clearly now than I did even then. You're writing for a particular audience; you should have a clear impression of who's out there and reading the stuff, what parameters you're working in —specifically, a finite number of pages, a finite number of words per page, the space needed for each picture and so on and so forth. Novels have a different audience; they have, by the nature of the medium, more possibilities. The stories can be as long as you want them to be, you're not locked into having a climax every sixth panel, you don't have to finish the story in seventeen pages or some multiple of seventeen pages. Comics and novels are fundamentally different, so your approach to them must also be fundamentally different.

JOPLIN: How did your career as a comics writer affect your writing of ***THE POINT MAN***? There must have been some things you had done in comics that sort of carried over into novel format.

ENGLEHART: I had made such a fetish of having nothing to do with the comic book technique when I first started writing my novel, that I fucked myself up. Quite regularly. I'd be zipping along and I'd get to a point and I'd say, "Well, I feel like doing ***this***, but maybe this is a remnant of my other life," so I'll do, you know, A instead of B. And now I find out that, no, B was perfectly okay, B is exactly what I should have done, and I went down the wrong road trying ***not*** to do a comic book type of thing.

JOPLIN: Considering that you had this strong desire for keeping your comics career apart from your novel career—why are you doing an interview for a comics-related magazine?

ENGLEHART: What I've found is that there's very little overlap—there are people who read comics, or there are people who don't. It's like being pregnant; either you are or you aren't. Nowhere in the paperback will my comics work be mentioned, because, as I've said in other interviews, that's ***a*** strike against you to people who don't know comics and have no idea what I did in comics, and so assume the worst. But people who ***do*** know comics know what I did and liked what I did, or at least bought an awful ***lot*** of what I did. I want to make these people aware that this book is coming out.

When I started writing ***THE POINT MAN***, I had no idea how slowly things moved, and that's been ***the*** major shock to my system. I announced I was leaving comics to do this thing four years ago, and I'm sure a lot of people are asking, "So where in hell is the goddamned book?" (Laughter)

From a comic book standpoint, it's been an awfully long time since the book was first talked about. So I want to let those people who said back in 1977, "Gee, I'd like to read Englehart's book," know that it's here.

JOPLIN: Did the comics teach you any lessons, as far as telling a story, constructing characters, motivation or other story-telling techniques, which you carried over into your book?

ENGLEHART: All that. It taught all of that. But again, the novel is so much bigger in every possible dimension—longer, wider, deeper, more complex—that if I had had no experience and had sat down to write the novel, had to completely invent everything myself for the first time, it would have been inferior to what I was able to do after having had seven years of doing comic books.

In comics, I had a reputation of being really good with characters and I think, within the limitations of the medium and within the amount of space that you could possibly allow for characterization,

I was very good at being able to do character studies in quick, broad strokes. But when you start to do character studies in novels and you don't have pictures and you don't have all the rest of those things... if I had only offered what I had offer in comics, my vaunted "mastery" of characterization would have looked very skimpy stretched out over the course of a novel. I had to learn to expand that. There was nothing that I could take ***directly*** from comics and just walk into novels and lay down again. I had to take it and grow with it, let it loose.

See, part of my reason for leaving comics, in addition to the whole "work-made-for-hire" thing, was that I was continuing to grow. I got into comics, grew into my role as comic book writer, kept on growing and became an innovator, kept on growing and became the leader of the pack—and then what? After seven years, I was still growing and there was no place else to go. I mean, if Marvel Comics had stayed what it was when I first got into it—that is, a continually viable, expanding, challenging medium—I might well have been able to grow, they would have continued to grow with me and there wouldn't have been a dichotomy. What I would have been doing would have been what Marvel was doing and that would have been it.

JOPLIN: What kind of learning experiences did the novel itself present? I remember reading, in another interview, how you thought that, since you could write seventeen pages of comics in three days, you could therefore write a 350-page novel in something like three months.

ENGLEHART: Yes. (Laughter) I tell you, I was so rational about the whole thing, I was rational with the information I had—but I was naive as hell! What I didn't understand is that novels go off in ***all*** directions. If it's thirty times as long, it's also thirty times as wide, as deep and as complex. A page of comics opposed to a page of a novel probably takes up about the same amount of my time per page, but if you're juggling some 360 pages, as I ended up doing in ***THE POINT MAN***—you know, if all you have to do is keep seventeen pages of these pages coherent, versus keeping 360 of them coherent—obviously, there's a lot more juggling involved.

It's like a superstructure. I found that when I was writing comics, I could sit down and do a story in three days. People would say, "What's up?", and I would tell them: "Well, I'm doing a ***BATMAN*** this week, and next week, it's a ***JUSTICE LEAGUE***," and so forth. With the novel, I was locked into this one project for months and months. I was carrying this gigantic superstructure in my head, and had to remember where every character was at every point in that superstructure, so that I didn't forget to put in a crossbeam or forget to make a connection or forget that there had been a connection made which would contradict something else that I wanted to do.

JOPLIN: Let's take the reciprocal side of that question now. How did the writing of the novel affect your later comic book work?

ENGLEHART: When I came back, after having spent a year in Europe working on the novel, having done my presentation—while I was in New York, first getting an agent and then a publisher, I was getting some work at DC. And I was having a hell of a time trying to write comics again. A year before, I had been at the height of my career, and a year later, I simply couldn't fit the stuff into seventeen pages anymore! I could spend seventeen pages just doing a ***character***, let alone getting a plot or a couple of fights in as well.

JOPLIN: That issue of ***BATMAN*** that featured the return of Dr. Phosphorus, for instance? (***BATMAN #311***)

ENGLEHART: That's the worst story I ever wrote; that story sucked. There were some that I liked: the Superman/Swamp Thing story, and a thing I did for Warren called "Passion," for example. But basically, I had expanded myself so much that to come back and fit into that format again was a real killer.

Now, though—having come out the other side of that transitional time, with my novel about to appear—I find writing comics to be like getting together with an old friend. I don't have to learn new skills anymore, so I can take each story as it comes, on whatever level it comes.

JOPLIN: Let's talk about the story itself. You've said in other interviews that the foundation of the book is a sort of psychic Cold War that exists between the nations.

ENGLEHART: Yes. The background is fairly well-known; I find that a lot of people, when I mention it to them, go, "Oh, yeah, sure." In 1957, the American military decided to find out if they could communicate telepathically with their submarines, since radio will not penetrate water and submarines which had submerged were out of communication. They had some intermittent success, but apparently a lot of intermittent failures as well, because they gave up the project. But the French heard about it and ran an article about it, and then the next thing you knew, Russia got up and said they had been doing it for years...

JOPLIN: Of course! (Laughter)

ENGLEHART: Of course. Now, in the late 1950s, that was a joke—you know, the Russians were always claiming they had invented everything twenty-five years earlier. So it's unclear whether they actually ***had been*** doing it or not, but they did start by that time. They started on Institute of Biological Studies which is totally committed to the military, as are most studies in Russia. And this was biological in terms of parapsychology, telekinesis, ESP, reading with your fingertips, all these kinds of things. They have been doing that since at least 1957. America, as I say, gave up on it, and it was only in Duke University in North Carolina, and Stanford University down in Palo Alto, where there have been any parapsychological studies at all for the last twenty-five years, of any major duration. But Jack Anderson recently reported in a typical Jack Anderson style, words to the effect of, "What sort of whacky things will the military be wasting our money on next?" Because it turns out that the American military has, finally, geared-up again to try to bring down satellites through telekinetic operation, to put an ESPer's consciousness into the middle of a meeting at the Kremlin—this kind of thing.

As is clear, there's always going to be a lot of skepticism on parapsychology, but my only point is that the Russians ***have*** been doing it. They've had 25 years to perfect whatever they've been able to do, and the reports that have come out of Russia indicate that they've been able to do some interesting things. My theory,

"There was nothing that I could take *directly* from comics and just walk into novels and lay down again. I had to take it and grow with it, let it loose."

then, my premise for the book, is: suppose there is a small-but-solid group of Russian agents who can do this pretty much at will, and what would that mean to espionage today if—Jack Anderson notwithstanding—the Russians were able to put a telepathic consciousness into the middle of meetings at the Pentagon? Or, as I have it, if agents in the field are able to create illusions, are able to communicate with each other telepathically? That's the background. It's extrasensory espionage.

JOPLIN: During the course of the book, you make references to both extrasensory powers, "psychokinetic" abilities and outright Magick. Perhaps we should take a moment to define terms...

ENGLEHART: Yes. Well..."psychokinetic" is a term for which I made up a new meaning. It simply means someone who's a drone, who just takes orders and performs.

Parapsychology is "scientific" Magick. It's Magick that those who are into it hope to be able to defend in seminars somewhere and not end up like Dr. Frankenstein, being laughed out of the hall. Whereas Magick goes on to include whole systems of knowledge, whole approaches and techniques which are much more closely aligned with dance, or ritual, or music or color—things which are there to excite the mind, to put one in a certain frame of mind, but none of which are psychologically or scientifically acceptable at this point.

I call Magick "wizardry," which means "the work of the wise." It is performed with the mind, using both halves of the brain as one, and its effects are often too subtle for hard measurement. Parapsychology is at least ***partially*** measurable. But I said to a friend of mine who's a research scientist one night, that after space—now that the space program is winding down—parapsychology would be the next major scientific endeavor. And he said, "Not a chance," because scientists are scared to death of anything that they can't organize and categorize, and no organized group of respectable scientists is ever going to really delve into the "unknown," because, by its very nature, it's not scientific. And scientists are not prepared to get into that.

JOPLIN: Let's go into the character of the book's protagonist, Max August, for a while.

ENGLEHART: Okay. Max is a not a wide-eyed believer; he's a fairly straightforward rising young disc jockey. Rock 'n roll radio is his business, and he's never encountered anything paranormal. He doesn't expect to—he doesn't really believe that it's around. So when things start happening to him, he spends a long time trying to explain it away. Max takes the scientific approach. He doesn't believe. His eyes glaze over when somebody tries to explain it to him. But he's continually thrust forward—you know, if he didn't believe it yesterday, wait'll he sees what happens tomorrow! Eventually, he ***has*** to start believing, and has to start trying to work out some "rational" way of dealing with it.

JOPLIN: How is he brought into the thrust of these forces?

ENGLEHART: He has a family heirloom, a carving of a lion, which was given to him by his uncle under very memorable circumstances. He told Max how noble lions were—the king of beasts. And his uncle told Max that if Max could think like a lion, if Max could live like a lion, he'd have a pretty decent life.

Max then discovers, right in the middle of these other problems that he's got, that someone ***seems*** to have stolen his lion. I say "seems to" because there is still an amber lion in his house that looks just like his lion—it even has the scratches and dents in it that the lion has picked up over the years—but it does ***not*** have his uncle's initials carved on the underside of it, which Max ***knows*** were there. It's sort of ***deja vu*** in reverse, in that here's this sculpture that couldn't possibly be anything other than what it is, but Max is convinced that it's not. Max has no explanation for this, but he has a conviction that somebody has stolen his lion and replaced it with an imperfect duplicate.

JOPLIN: According to the story, Max is a well-to-do DJ. He's got a nice home in the Berkeley hills, with lots of worldly possessions—and yet, only this lion is missing? There must be some heavy significance to the lion.

ENGLEHART: Well, as it turns out, there is, yes. We pretty much approach the story from Max's point of view; as we meet characters, we see them the way Max sees them, and so if they turn out to be something different from the way he sees them, we're as confused as he is. And the lion, too, is more than he thinks it is in the beginning.

JOPLIN: The reproduced lion placed in Max's apartment was exact, down to the last detail—nicks and cuts, cigarette burns and so on—but the initials were not carved on the bottom. Why would such a deliberate omission be made?

ENGLEHART: To quote the Bavarian Illuminati, it's a mindfuck. It's a thing ***that*** has no rational explanation. And ***that's*** the rational explanation. The world Max is coming from is a rational world, a world that doesn't believe in Magick. And the people he's up against ***do*** believe in Magick; they're operating in an "irrational world." And it's important to them that their world ***be*** irrational. Nothing in Max's life has prepared him to be able to deal with this sort of people. And that's one of the reasons that they were able to leave an imperfect duplicate, because they know he can't do anything about it. It's a finger jabbed in Max's eye, rather than an attempt to fool him.

JOPLIN: So Max gets involved in the story by setting out to find where his lion has been taken to, and get it back.

ENGLEHART: Well, it's about all he ***can*** do, because he's faced with

something which is inexplicable. His options at that point would be to go paranoid, you know, to start gibbering—that's a little heavy; I'm exagerrating—or to say, "There's something wrong here, and I'm going to have to expand enough to fit that into my universe," **or** he can take the tack which I think most people would take, which is to just shut it out, which is what science does with parapsychology and/or Magick all the time. You know, if the facts don't fit the theory, then too bad for the facts.

Max doesn't ignore the fact that he can't explain any of this, but he doesn't waste time worrying about it. He just goes out very "pointman-edly" to find his lion.

JOPLIN: Hold on—"pointman-edly?" Where does that come from?

ENGLEHART: Well, Max—the first level of meaning for the book's title comes out of Max's experience in Vietnam. Max was one of the hundreds of thousands of guys who had no interest in going to Vietnam, but decided he wasn't opposed enough to flee to Canada or burn his draft card. And while in Nam, he became a point man, which is a scout. The way it was set up in Max's company was that when they were going to move through the jungle, one of their number, simply by selection on a rotating basis, would have to go out front about a quarter mile or so—somewhere within sight of the company—and lead the company to wherever they were going. He would be out there looking for signs of the enemy. And if the enemy were out there and decided to blow somebody away, they'd get ***him***, whereas the rest of the company would be a quarter mile bgck behind him, and could have a chance to do something about it.

Max, no super-hero he, was scared shitless the first time he was picked out to go do this thing. But—I did several interviews with pointmen during the course of the book, and they all reported the same experience: You get out there and you are scared shitless; not only are there Vietcong out there, but there are tigers, snakes —all the stuff that was in ***APOCALYPSE NOW***—and the first hour is just continuous terror, total paranoia, the whole thing. But if you don't die during that first hour, after a while, like anything else, the job starts becoming familiar—you've done this before; you know that you can do ***this*** and you won't die, and you can do ***that*** and it'll be okay, too.

And every point man I talked to told me that, by the end of his journey through the jungle, he had become high. His consciousness had been expanded. You become very sensitive to everything you might encounter, so that you become able to ***taste*** the air in your lungs, you can ***touch*** the temperature with your fingertips, you can ***feel*** the hair growing on your head—all these sorts of things.

Max got to like it. And Max started volunteering point man.

JOPLIN: So "pointman-edly" could mean highly aware, independently pursuing this goal.

ENGLEHART: Yeah. The point man is a sense of self-creation, independence—being on your own and being able to handle it.

JOPLIN: You mentioned the "first level" of meaning for the book's title. Are there other levels as well?

ENGLEHART: Okay. Max came back from Vietnam, went into rock 'n roll radio, rose in the field, became very good, very popular at what he was doing and ended up doing weekdays, 4 to 8 at KQBU in San Francisco, which is where the book begins. Max is now in his early thirties, he's been doing this for ten years. He's at the top of his field, but he's running out of interest in it. We find Max at a crossroads. And at that point, he's offered a chance to leave the "on the air" business and move up into management. The company who owns the station sends out a representative by the name of Madeline Riggs to scout out the station and figure out what to do about it ratings-wise, money-wise, whatever corporations are interested in. And she picks Max to take over the station—but they are going to computerize the operation.

The second level of meaning is that here, as well at other times in the book, Max isn't standing on an edge, because there isn't even a line to cross. He's standing on a point, and he can fall in any direction from that point. He loved rock 'n roll radio as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, he does not feel that what this Madeline Riggs is offering is what he loves. On the other hand, he's being offered a tremendous raise, a position of authority, and a chance to run the station as he wants to within the limits they are providing. He is also beginning to get very interested in Madeline Riggs. He's just not sure where he wants to go at this point.

JOPLIN: I think it's safe to assume that Max, like many of the characters you handled in comics, goes through a trial by fire of some sort and comes to a realization of self by the end of the book. In comics, you had that whole story where Dr. Strange doubts himself and goes to Hell, or the story where Captain America became the Nomad. How would you stack up Max August against these two stories, in terms of complexity of characterization and so forth?

ENGLEHART: There's certainly more complexity to Max. Now I'll stand both of those sequences you mentioned against anything available in comics, because even now, four years after I've gotten out of comics, I'm still proud of what I did there. But what I'm saying is, when I wrote the "Captain America gives up being Captain America" story, I was bringing to bear every bit of skill I had at that time to tell the story that I wanted to tell. The same is true with what I did with Max August, but the difference is that here I'm not working in a limited-space format, with somebody else's character.

I've always maintained that, if you're writing an established character, it's not your function to come in and say, "Hi, I'm going to change this guy overnight because I'm a different writer." I believe in the character too much.

I wrote ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***. He rose and advanced from the interpretation that was done of him before, but it was still clearly the same guy, operating off the same basic structures. The same with ***DOCTOR STRANGE***. Even though I took him, stretched him out into areas far beyond anything he'd been into before, still, he ***had*** to be Doctor Strange. He couldn't be Doctor Fate, he couldn't be Doctor Glowworm.

"When I was newer to the occult trip, I was into everything I could find, just checking it out. I've dabbled into a lot of things."

And it's the same with Max. Max August has to be Max August. He was created specifically for this story, and he starts out—first of all, he starts out as a real person, not as a super-hero, not as someone with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men, but as a real person. And then, in the course of the much longer and more complex story, he rises and advances in a more complex way.

It's a question of the two media. If you took Max August and somehow quantified him and stuck him up against Doctor Strange and somehow quantified ***him***, Doctor Strange would come out as being much simpler than Max August. But I was working to full capacity in each medium.

JOPLIN: It's pretty common knowledge that Steve Englehart is into astrology and has been interested in the occult, and that this motivated a lot of his "***Doctor Strange***" writing. Let's talk for a while about the research you did for ***THE POINT MAN***. For instance, are the rituals used in the book fairly authentic, or are they just made up?

ENGLEHART: Yes. (Laughter) There are rituals in there which are absolutely authentic. Generally, these appear in the early parts of the book. As we get deeper into Magick and wizardry, I start doctoring them slightly, because you can never really tell.

The research—it's been ongoing research on my part since 1973, when I began to write ***DOCTOR STRANGE***. I started to educate myself in metaphysics, so I encountered a lot of things along the way that I was able to draw upon. For ***THE POINT MAN*** specifically, I did research in a book called ***PSYCHIC DISCOVERIES BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN.***[1] In the late 1960s, when there was a great meeting of the minds between America and Russia, the authors of the book were two Americans who attended scientific conferences in Russia and met many of the researchers and many of the people being researched.

Speaking of research... there's a point early in the story where Max takes Madeline Riggs, his boss of sorts, out to dinner. They become fast friends, they go back to her hotel, go up to her room and screw. My wife, Terry, and I were at a relative's house for Thanksgiving, and my uncle was reading the book. He looks up, gives me this big wink and says, "You know, this scene about taking this woman upstairs and screwing her... what kind of research did you do for that?" Made it up! Made everything up! (Laughter)

JOPLIN: Oh yes, of course!

ENGLEHART: But anyway—a lot of these things were done at Academgorodok, the science-city in Siberia that the Russians have going.

JOPLIN: Are we speaking here of Magick, or powers such as ESP and telekinesis?

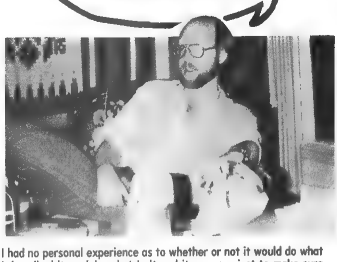
ENGLEHART: We're talking more of ESP and mind-over-matter powers. Magick is... I really know of no scientific research on that, because while you can get grants or State backing for something like ESP, where you can at least convince ***some*** people that it makes sense, Magick, per se, the conjuring of creatures or causing changes in your environment through mental powers... it probably is the subject of research somewhere, but I'm not familiar with any on an organized level. There are certainly a lot of people doing research in the privacy of their own homes, without the rigorous conditions and so forth that science would prefer, but they ***do*** perform Magick for themselves and I'm familiar with some of the people in the Bay Area and know what they've done. But I don't know of any "scientific" research.

JOPLIN: When you were writing down the spells and rituals used in the book, did you think about the possibility of somebody out there picking up on them and trying them out?

ENGLEHART: That's why I altered the words on anything that was too heavy. There are some spells in there that are well-known, venerable spells which a great many people use; they're basically cleansing spells, banishing spells. You couldn't hurt yourself with them. But there ***is*** one spell in the book that I worked on to negate.

[1]By Sheila Ostrander & Lynn Schroeder (Bantam, 1971).

"Nowhere in the paperback will my comics work be mentioned...that's a strike against you to people who don't know comics and have no idea what I did in comics, and so assume the worst."



I had no personal experience as to whether or not it would do what I described it as doing, but I altered it anyway, just to make sure nobody could do any damage with it.

JOPLIN: Your treatment of rituals in ***THE POINT MAN*** is similar to what John David Warner did when he wrote ***THE SON OF SATAN***. In his last issue, he depicted a witch using the "Eko, Eko, Azarak" chant, but substituted "om" for "Azarak." Other than that, the chant was genuine, and the Circle depicted in the episode was genuine.

ENGLEHART: John is a very good mystic. I think I had first heard about him in 1977, when I was preparing to leave the country for Europe. I was back in New York in the Summer of 1978, selling my book, and I had a really long time to get to know some people I hadn't known too well before, in addition to re-establishing a few contacts. And that's when John and I, as well as a few other people, first got together and did some ritual work.

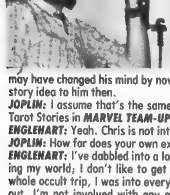
JOPLIN: You mean there are more extracurricular activities at Marvel than a baseball team?

ENGLEHART: You'd be surprised! (Laughter)

JOPLIN: I'd rather not. John's okay, but others—I don't know if they would object or not. They might. So we'll just leave them as mysterious strangers lurking around Marvel. I was just thinking, though, of other writers who use Tarot and so on in their stories. Steve Gerber's "***Son of Satan,***" Tarot stories, for instance.

ENGLEHART: Gerber's not into it. Gerber—it's funny, I sometimes think that Gerber and I are like mirror-images of each other. We're both smart, we're both independent, we both go off looking for bizarre angles to hang our stories on. But I generally take the optimistic approach, "the rising and advancing of the spirit," and he generally takes the pessimistic approach. So what we both come up with is very different. I remember walking through Greenwich Village with him one night, discussing Tarot and that ***"Son of Satan"*** sequence—he absolutely did not believe in Magick; it was just a story springboard to him. Steve is totally, traditionally realistic. He

"The book involves Magick which has actually, physically been tested in laboratories. I didn't make up anything."



may have changed his mind by now, for all I know, but it was just a story idea to him then.

JOPLIN: I assume that's the same situation with Chris Claremont's Tarot Stories in ***MARVEL TEAM-UP*** with Doctor Strange.

ENGLEHART: Yeah. Chris is not into Magick either.

JOPLIN: How far does your own experience in Magick go to?

ENGLEHART: I've dabbled into a lot of things. I like to keep expanding my world; I don't like to get static. When I was newer to the whole occult trip, I was into everything I could find, just checking it out. I'm not involved with any group at the moment, but I have been before.

JOPLIN: How did you first get interested? Has it always been a little niggling in the back of your head?

ENGLEHART: I've always been interested in "why." I always wanted to ***know*** "why." I remember going to a baseball game with my father and asking him something like, "What would happen if somebody hit a ball toward the outfield that was going to fall in the park, but instead it landed on the back of a pigeon and the pigeon carried it out of the park?" (chuckles) I had an involved mind and a desire to understand right from the start. I got my BA in psychology in college, but that still didn't answer the question.

I have a head that works well with logic systems. In school, I learned Spanish, French and German; I learned calculus and so on. I also learned the Marvel Comics reality. Then I learned the logic system of astrology, as well as the other logic systems: kabala, Tarot— all those fields.

The first thing I got into was astrology. I was doing some reading into Magick when I was doing ***DOCTOR STRANGE***, just sort of flitting around. I homed in on astrology and learned it extremely quickly. I must say that I approached it skeptically; I'm not a true believer. I did my own chart, read it out and was surprised to find that it was valid. Then I started doing everyone else's charts, and ***they*** all worked. And I found that, once I had committed myself to it, the learning of this logic system was fairly simple. In fact, I teach classes on astrology around the Bay Area on a sort of ***ad hoc*** basis. My general approach is that not only is it ***not*** unreal, but it's actually very simple.

Astrology gave a sort of basis, a way of compartmentalizing reality. Then I went looking for the other systems that would do that: kabala, Tarot, palmistry, geomancy, all the different systems. Now I can come flying in like some Visigoth on any new system, pick it apart and plug it into my system quickly. So today, I've got a pretty good repertoire of different approaches to understanding larger realities, inner realities, whatever you want to call them. But astrology remains my base; astrology is the most "scientific" of the bunch because it deals with the actual positions of the planets. It simply says that this means something, whereas most of the other systems are dealing with situations that arise at the moment of study. For instance, when you do divination with the Tarot, sure you lay the cards out, but you're ***assuming*** that there's some unseen force on the other side, giving you the cards you need to get the message that you need. With astrology, you're looking at physical reality and trying to interpret it.

I'm into realism. I said to somebody once that I absolutely believe in reality. I just believe in a very large reality, that's all.

JOPLIN: How do you reconcile your interest in the occult with your psychology background?

ENGLEHART: Psychology is a pseudo-science. My experience in both psychology and parapsychology has shown me that there are some simply arrived-at root causes behind reality, and psychology seems to be one step removed from all this. For instance, astrology would say you have, oh, let's say an afflicted Saturn. And if you don't know what that means, it would sound like gibberish. But if you ***do*** know what it means, it's a fairly simple concept. You're dealing with the energies of the universe, which I believe ***do*** exist, and which ***do*** influence me. With psychology, you're looking at the results, rather than the causes. You're saying, "Well, you've had all these results, these things that have happened to you, and we can intuit some causes for them," whereas with astrology, you're just saying, "Here's the cause." I find psychology one step removed from where it ought to be, and therefore, it's one of those sciences that nobody really understands, like economics or meteorology. Trials are notorious for lining up five psychologists for the prosecution versus five psychologists for the defense, ***all*** of whom have different opinions of what's going on. I got my degree in psychology, but by the time I was through, I had seen through it.

JOPLIN: And astrology answered more of your "whys."

ENGLEHART: Oh, yeah. It's deeper. It's closer to the root of the situation.

JOPLIN: In ***THE POINT MAN***, one of the wizards in the story remarks to Max that when he first studied Magick, he was sworn to secrecy, but that today, he sees all the rituals he used to have to keep mum about appearing in public print.

ENGLEHART: Yes, that's true. It's not necessarily readily available, but it's not particularly hard to find, either. For many years, there was an oath of secrecy, and all really serious mystical organizations still require oaths of secrecy— for various reasons, not the least of which is keeping things secret, but for creating an ***esprit-de-corps***, for creating a sense of awe and mystery about the knowledge being imparted. That's not just for show purposes; if you hold something in higher esteem, it will mean more to you and you'll be able to do more with it. But the whole information explosion and consciousness explosion in this century has rendered most of what they once taught you under secret oath public knowledge, and not everybody knows that they know, or knows what the Hell they're doing with it.

JOPLIN: Do you perhaps foresee a society of the future like the one Siss-Neg came from, where large numbers of people use Magick in their everyday lives?

ENGLEHART: Yes, I think so. Science has finally decided that there are indeed two sides to the brain: one side takes care of logic and analysis, one side takes care of conception and esthetic judgements. They work in tandem, and using the power of the esthetic side, without letting it take control of you, is a good definition of Magick. The thrust of humanity is always "the rising and advancing of the spirit," so I would think that a hundred years down the line, telekinesis, ESP, that sort of thing, would be much more commonplace. As more and more people not only discover that they ***can*** do it, but that, because more and more people are doing it, that it's more ***acceptable*** to do, sometime down the line, everybody will be what we now call a wizard. Nobody will be too amazed by the fact that people do this sort of thing.

JOPLIN: How would you describe your proficiency at wizardry?

ENGLEHART: That's difficult to answer, because wizardry is very much in the mind of the beholder. There are areas where I think I'm quite strong in this understanding of what the Hell is going on in

this "hidden" side of reality. And there are other areas where I have no proficiency at all. So, to say where I rank on a one-to-ten scale would be difficult, because you could find people who were heavier than I am in some areas and you could find people who were lighter than I am in other areas. It's just something that I have an aptitude for. It's something that I take a fairly level-headed approach to, which is the best approach to take. You know, the Moonies are just as obnoxious as Carl Sagan, who's at the opposite end of the scale.

JOPLIN: Do you think that ***THE POINT MAN*** might encourage other people to follow the same path you followed and explore the "unseen world" of the metaphysical?

ENGLEHART: Well, I'm not a preacher. I say that a lot, because I mean I'm into this thing, and I'm not shy about saying it, but I'm very skeptical of other people trying to get me to follow their paths. So I just lay it out there. I'm trying to entertain. I'm trying to entertain in a place where nobody else is entertaining. I'm using some reality that hasn't been used yet, in order to tell a story that hasn't been told yet, which is what I like to do. If people find this intriguing enough to want to take a shot at it themselves, that's perfectly okay with me, but I didn't ***set out*** to try and get people to do that. If I were to advocate ***anything*** it would be for each person to try and find out what works right for ***him***, and then follow his own path.

JOPLIN: So let it be known that Steve Englehart is not the Jerry Falwell of the occult.

ENGLEHART: Uh-uh! (Laughter)

JOPLIN: Did you run into any problems after the book had been sold to Dell?

ENGLEHART: Yes, over the category. The book involves Magick which has actually, physically been tested in laboratories. I didn't make up anything. Therefore, I considered the book to be a "real-life" novel. In other words, not a fantasy.

Interestingly enough, I found that, whenever I would explain what the book was about to someone who lived on the West Coast, he would almost invariably say, "Sure! Good idea!" But whenever I would explain the book to someone on the East Coast, I'd hear, "Oh, that's science-fiction, huh?" And that was pretty much the attitude at the New York-based publishing companies. Magick, by their definition, could not be real.

It was just a place where the minds could not meet. I insisted that the book be released just saying "Dell" on the cover, as opposed to "Dell Fantasy" or "Dell Science-Fiction," and they never quite came around to that. What we finally agreed on was that the cover will say just "Dell," but the spine will say "Dell Fantasy." So it all depends on which side of the book you're looking at.

JOPLIN: What are your plans for the future? I know you're at work on your second novel, ***BLUE BLOOD***. Do you have another two or three books lined up to do?

ENGLEHART: When I was working on ***THE POINT MAN***, I came up with concepts for other books that I wanted to write, and kept them in a notebook. When I had finished writing them down, one concept solidified for me, and that became the basis of the second novel. I still have that notebook, and several concepts are vying for what will be the third book, but I won't have to decide on anything until after I'm done with the second one.

JOPLIN: Have you ever entertained the possibility of doing a series character?

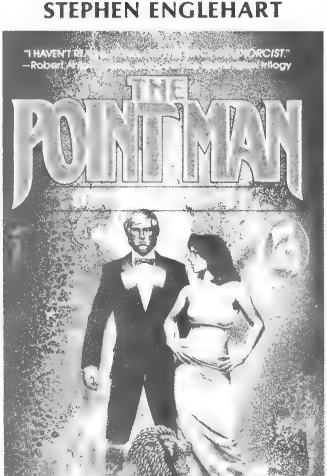
ENGLEHART: In books? No, I haven't, really. It's funny because, as a reader, I like series; I like characters that grow from story to story. It's what I did in comics, but it's not really what I'd like to do in books. At the end of ***THE POINT MAN***, the story's over. It's possible that Max August and Valerie Drake could return in the next phase. . .

JOPLIN: POINT MAN III (laughter)

ENGLEHART: Yeah, but I really don't want to do that. But then again, who's to say? I'm living in the commercial world. Let's put it this way: unless there were a strong outcry from lots of people writing in and saying, "We really want to see more of this character," I don't intend to do any more. I've said what I had to say with this book.

From The Man Who Delivered
THE BATMAN
DOCTOR STRANGE
CAPTAIN AMERICA
SHANG-CHI
STAR-LORD

STEPHEN ENGLEHART



"Stephen Englehart writes with his ears, and with his eyes Few working writers alive have his sense of sound and of scene." —Theodore Sturgeon

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ENGLEHART & ROGERS

BUT I STILL DON'T HAVE WHAT I REQUIRE--A LEGAL CLAIM TO YOUR NEW--IMPROVED--JOKER-FISH! IF THAT DOESN'T CHANGE BY 3 A.M., THE NUMBER-TWO BUREAUCRAT WILL FEEL MY WRATH!
JOKER HAS SPOKEN!
THE BATMAN MAKES NO REPLY!

the Definitive Batman

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Who would have thought it? Steve Englehart had been one of Marvel's best, most innovative authors of the 1970s. Building upon the work of Lee, Kirby, Ditko and Thomas, he had aroused more of our sense of wonder through his expansion and deepening of the **"Dr. Strange"** mythos and his explorations of the Marvel Universe in ***AVENGERS.*** Englehart mirrored our horror and shock over Watergate in his Secret Empire thriller in ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***, and through the identity crises it triggered in its newly-disillusioned hero. Less noticeably, he was intelligently examining the strengths and weaknesses in the romantic bonds between characters: The Vision and The Scarlet Witch, Mantis and The Swordsman, and, most strikingly, Dr. Strange and Clea. He wrote these three series with a vitality and intelligence that puts much of today's comics work to shame, plus his work in co-conceptualizing ***MASTER OF KUNG FU*** and creating the potentially fascinating ***"Star-Lord"*** stood to his credit. But then, under controversial circumstances, Englehart departed Marvel for DC. Whatever could he possibly do there? Hadn't he demonstrated an affectionate contempt for The Justice League in his parody in ***AVENGERS?*** Hadn't his Batman rip-off, The Shroud, been a complete bore? And now he was going to write Batman and The JLA? He was going to put his talent for developing continuity and characterization to work at a company not known for great success at either?

Who would have thought it?

Then there was this new artist Englehart was going to do Batman with, Marshall Rogers. What had he done so far in mainstream comics? Well, there were those inane ***"Calculator"*** stories in ***DETECTIVE.*** The blame for them belongs with the writer, it's true, but the artwork didn't impress. There was also the two-part ***"Daughters of the Dragon"*** adventure Rogers did with Chris Claremont for ***DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU.*** Now that was a fine story in both script and art, but surely it proved that Rogers' talents lay with comparatively realistic material. The Batman requires a feel for the "creature of the night" style blending Gothic horror elements and German expressionism and a 1930s pulp look. Come to think of it, Englehart had never worked on this kind of story either.

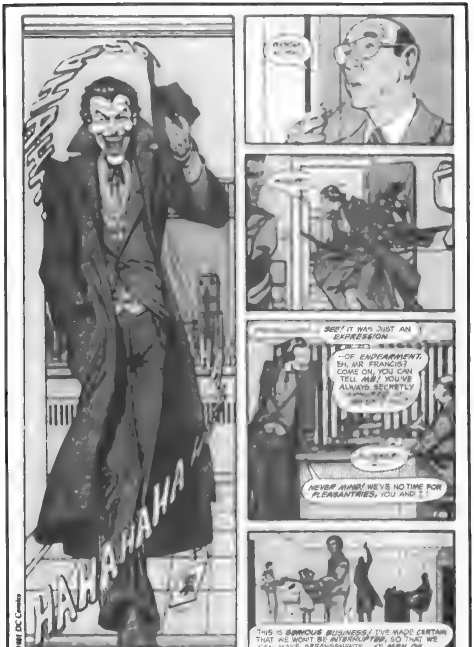
So, who would have thought that from this unlikely pairing would come what might be the mainstream comics masterpieces of the 1970s? But with ***DETECTIVE #471-476***, the ***"Batman"*** series came to artistic fulfillment.

It was not a completely new Steve Englehart who wrote this series, of course; the links to his previous work might not be obvious, but they are strong ones. Englehart is a great respecter of comics traditions. This fact manifests itself in the kind of series he works on: Doug Moench, Don McGregor, and Steve Gerber stayed away from the major super-hero series, whereas Englehart did his most memorable work with them. Englehart also worked within the traditional conventions of plotting Marvel/DC stories (with some variations in ***DR. STRANGE***), with the result that his best work combined personal expression with high entertainment values, without neglecting or subverting one in favor of the other. He often succeeded in finding the middle road between the impassable Black Forest of Authorial Self-Indulgence and the Quicksand Pit of Cynicism, reserved for those who believe comics can be no more than mindless fluff. (The latter has become an increasingly popular place of residence these days.)

So here was Englehart writing The Batman, and crafting a thriller that lived up to the meaning of the word. He also followed tradition by incorporating as much of the mythos of a series as he could. Thus one of Englehart's first acts, in the two ***DETECTIVE*** issues he did with Walt Simonson before Rogers came aboard, was to bring back the Batcave. The original, lying beneath "stately Wayne Manor," had been abandoned along with the anachronistic mansion some years earlier in order to locate The Batman in the heart of the city he protected. That move had been a good idea,

but to deprive The Batman of a headquarters—a "home" of sorts, actually—which reinforced his aura of mystery and slightly sinister eeriness was comparable to evicting Sherlock Holmes from Baker Street. So a new Batcave was constructed in an abandoned, forgotten subway tunnel beneath the Wayne Foundation Building, and once more the Batman stalked among the enormous, ominous momentoes of past struggles with surreal evils. Robin, the banished "kid sidekick," returned for a while, and so did some classic villains. The best known of these, The Joker and The Penguin, appeared, but so did the perhaps equally great Professor Hugo Strange, who had been unseen since 1940. Even Police Chief O'Hara from the television series showed up, and longtime supporting players Alfred and Commissioner Gordon received prominent roles. A string of familiar names wound through the dialogue, not only those of memorable past characters—Joe Chill, Julie Madison, Catwoman, Riddler, Scarecrow, Ra's al Ghul—but also those of comics greats who had contributed to the series' history: Jerry Robinson, Bill Finger (as Finger Alley), (John) Broome, Gardner Fox (as Fox Gardens), and more. Even elements of classic Batman plots reappeared in homages. The Joker once more announced his murder plans to the public in advance, this time on television—rather than on radio as in ***BATMAN #1***—and once more the police were helpless to prevent his prophecies from coming true. The Penguin again concocted intricate and puzzling clues to his crimes, Hugo Strange again transformed men into monsters, and Batman battled his long-forgotten 1950s foe Deadshot atop a Finger-like gigantic household object (this time a typewriter). Englehart was portraying himself as the proud heir to a noble storytelling tradition. In recapping that tradition, he would sum up its meaning. Moreover, he would build upon it and extend it.

Robin returned not simply to help Batman in a few fights, but so that Englehart could re-establish and emphasize the warmth in their father-son/big brother-little brother relationship. The Penguin proved not to be a clown but a grandmaster in playing challenging games of wits with The Batman, games in which Englehart's skilled hand baffled not only the reader but Robin as well. One of Englehart's greatest achievements lies in his transformation of The Joker. Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams had already junked the notion that the Joker was something of a comic relief character; they made him again what he was in 1940—a sadistic murderer whose glee in his crimes only made them more horrifying. Englehart took this one step further. Formerly, The Joker had always behaved in a logical if perverse fashion; Englehart's Joker was dangerously irrational. At one point a henchman innocently questions whether a plan will work; the next moment The Joker has shoved him in front of oncoming traffic. Englehart has The Joker suddenly appear before a wholly inoffensive nonentity of a government official with a ludicrous scheme for seizing ownership of all the fish in U.S. waters. I'll simply copyright them, the Joker boasts. The poor official tells The Joker the plan will not work, and insane hatred gleams in the Joker's eye. The official soon finds himself murdered, his face twisted in a death's-head grin. The Joker has launched a series of killings that no one seems able to halt. It is not just a calculating, cold-blooded murderer at work as it was in ***BATMAN #1***. No, this time it is as if the force of the irrational, dark repressed side of man's consciousness had been loosed upon civilization. "Why me?" another official targeted for death asks the Batman. "If not you, then it would be someone else," The Batman replies; The Joker is like a time bomb, The Batman goes on, that must explode every so often.


HAHAHAHA
SEE! IT WAS JUST AN EXPRESSION
...OF ENDEARMENT, EH, MR. FRANCIS! COME ON, YOU CAN TELL ME! YOU'VE ALWAYS SECRETLY
NEVER MIND! WE'VE NO TIME FOR PLEASANTRIES, YOU AND I!
THIS IS SERIOUS BUSINESS! I'VE MADE CERTAIN THAT HE WON'T BE INTERRUPTED, SO THAT WE CAN MAKE ARRANGEMENTS - RE MEN OF LEISURE!
©1981 DC Comics

"Englehart took [The Joker] one step further. Formerly, The Joker had always behaved in a logical if perverse fashion; Englehart's Joker was dangerously irrational."

Englehart did not neglect his preoccupation with politics either. The six issues he did with Rogers were framed by the beginning and end of the conspiracy led by Boss Thorne, the head of a corrupt political machine that controlled Gotham, to brand The Batman an outlaw and expose his true identity. But politics was a

AND WHEN SHE HAS...
--SO I DIDN'T KNOW WHO ELSE TO CALL--
--BUT BRUCE HAD TALKED ABOUT YOU--
LISTEN, SILVER--I'M SURE THERE'S NOTHING TO GET UPTIGHT ABOUT.
ONE THING I KNOW IS THAT BRUCE CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF. I'M SORRY HE PUT YOU DOWN, BUT--
--THAT'S BRUCE!
KEEP YOUR CHIN UP. THINGS MAY WORK OUT YET.
©1981 DC Comics

Silver St. Cloud: "The first believable love interest for Batman/Bruce Wayne in the nearly forty-year history of the series...She was passionate, vulnerable, insightful, intelligent and finally courageous. Silver seemed to grow as a character as the story progressed."

subsidiary theme in these stories. As we shall see, Thorne's real thematic importance lay elsewhere.

Englehart's romantic themes resurfaced with the introduction of Silver St. Cloud, who was, incredibly, the first believable love interest for Batman/Bruce Wayne in the nearly forty-year history of the series. The others had included a bland ingenue (Julie Madison), a snoopy Lois Lane clone (Vicki Vale), an unreasonable female facsimile of Batman himself (Kathy "Batwoman" Kane), innumerable faceless companions to Wayne the alleged playboy, and a collection of villainesses who were less Caniffian or Eisnerian femme fatales than demented, amoral little girls (Talia and, alas, in most stories, The Catwoman). Silver began as something of a blank, but she evolved quickly. She was passionate, vulnerable, insightful, intelligent and finally courageous. Silver seemed to grow as a character as the story progressed, and this may be central to Englehart's theme throughout the ***DETECTIVE*** issues, and his work as a whole.

Englehart named one of his creations Shang-Chi, meaning "the rising and advancing of a spirit." All of his best work shows us characters undergoing this process, ascending from ignorance, evil, or a simple lack of awareness to wisdom, heroism and even godhood. Doctor Strange confronts his fears and weaknesses (given actual forms) in his life's journey towards the godlike state which The Ancient One has achieved. The power-hungry, emotionally unstable Kang eventually becomes the Prospero-like Immortus; the lowly Mantis discovers herself to be The Celestial Madonna; The Swordsman makes a brave attempt to rise from moral dissolution to heroism; Captain America loses his ideals, even his sense of self, and then regains them; the original Human Torch goes through Hell but finally reaches wedded bliss as the Vision; Star-Lord, through divine guidance, moves from psychosis towards, presumably, a kind of sainthood. Englehart's Batman series centers on this theme as well, but for once, it is not the hero who embarks on this moral quest. The Batman has achieved his sainthood. Hugo Strange marvels that Bruce Wayne rules the city by day and Batman rules it by night. The Batman has become a kind of king, as if by right, and Strange is overwhelmed with admiration for him. The Batman, Silver asserts, is Gotham's "Avenging Angel," and although Thorne makes him an outlaw, we are assured that the people of Gotham have not swayed from their loyalty to him. Englehart's Batman is certainly quite human. We can sense the depth of his love for Silver and the warmth in his half paternal, half fraternal relationship with Robin. His capture by Strange proves him less than omnipotent; his inability to grasp the whole truth about Strange at the end shows him to be less than omniscient. And yet Englehart's Batman is all that a human being can be. He sees truths that others miss, the Penguin story tell us. He has directed his vengefulness over his parents' deaths into useful channels, unlike his equally revenge-obsessed opposite, Deadshot, whom Batman tells us has "wasted" years in pursuit of his goal. And The Batman has more courage than most. He tells us himself in the ***"Joker"*** story that he is the only one "crazy" enough to pursue the murderous clown. Elsewhere, Englehart had the Batman tell us that ever since his parents were shot, his whole world has gone a little "crazy." This too is all to the point.

Englehart's Batman is not unlike his Doctor Strange struggling within the surreal Orb of Agamotto or Nightmare's world. This Batman mostly appears at night, the time of dreams, when respected businessman Bruce Wayne and politician Thorne, opponents on the city council, transform into life-and-death enemies, a costumed vigilante and a murderous criminal. It is when the bustling, crowded streets of mid-town Gotham that Rogers depicts so brilliantly give way to a theatre inhabited only by grotesque master criminals and even monsters. This nocturnal world is distorted, "crazy," and perhaps it takes someone equally "crazy" to cope with it, and prevent it from overwhelming the world of daylight. But Batman's "craziness" is really no such thing. It is, if

YOU READY TO TALK YET, HUGO?
HUGO?
NEVER!
YOU WILL NEVER STEAL MY SECRET, THORNE!
BECAUSE--IT IS MOST OF MY SECRET!
IT BELONGS TO--THE BATMAN!
©1982 DC Comics
I'D LEARN THE BATMAN'S SECRET IF YOU WOULD ONLY TELL ME!
I WAS A FOOL TO EVER THINK OF STEALING THEM!
THE BATMAN--HE TOO GOOD FOR SUCH AS YOU--THORNE!
HE AND I ARE TWO OF A KIND--
I WILL--NEVER--
--BEE-RAY--

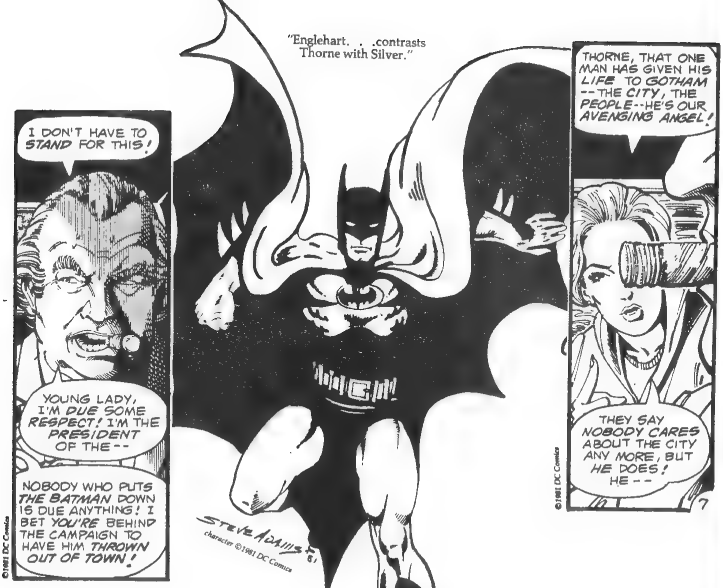
The Death of Hugo Strange: "...it becomes evident that Strange impersonates The Batman and Wayne because he has admired the man so, and wants to be that man...Strange has come to realize that knowledge of who—and what—The Batman is must be 'earned.'"

you will, a super-human dedication to justice that causes him to take the risks that no one else will, to risk his life for others, as Silver tells him, until his luck runs out, to maintain peace and sanity in his city.

The question posed in Englehart's stories is not how does Batman react to events, but how do characters relate to him? Do you try to rise to his level or do you try to destroy him and what he stands for? Look at the amazing second Englehart/Rogers issue: the **"Batman"** story without The Batman, who spends the whole story as a captive, drugged into helplessness by Hugo Strange. Instead the action in the story is carried forward by those in whom The Batman has inspired a sense of loyalty and devotion. First Alfred dedicates himself to the struggle to liberate Batman from Strange, then Silver does, then Robin, and finally—astonishingly—Strange himself. The villains in Englehart's **"Batman"** stories also recognize the hero's worth. Deadshot dedicates years of his life to preparing for revenge on him. The Penguin expends a fortune in a scheme to divert his attention from his true plans. The Joker warns Thorne that he will allow no one to kill The Batman but himself. In astonishment Thorne realizes that the Joker and Hugo Strange have both been "protecting" The Batman, as if they too were his friends. But whereas the Joker fully intends to kill The Batman, Strange is of two minds on the subject.

Englehart's Hugo Strange is a villain out of Fritz Lang's spy and science fiction films: a showman, a maker of monsters, a psychiatrist who enslaves his "patients," a master of disguise and, most disturbingly, a ***doppelganger***. Strange does not only defeat and unmask The Batman, but he steals both his identities, leaving him in a deathlike coma while he masquerades as both The Batman and Bruce Wayne. Strange prides himself on the fact that he alone has been able to triumph so completely over The Batman; his self-image is wholly dependent on the idea that he has proven himself the superior of the "king" of Gotham. And now Strange is the unsuspected imposter who has seized both the king's thrones. But it becomes evident that Strange impersonates The Batman and Wayne because he has admired the man so, and wants to be that man. "It's as if he thought he **was** The Batman," mutters Thorne uncomprehendingly. Thorne captures Strange and has him brutally beaten to force him to reveal Batman's true identity, but Strange courageously refuses. In the midst of his torture, Strange has come to realize that knowledge of who—and what—The Batman is must be "earned." Strange has by his lights earned it by defeating The Batman and thus proving himself his superior, but Englehart is surely implying more here. Strange recognizes the Batman's greatness as a man; Thorne cannot. Strange sinks into death pledging "I will never betray him," and his ghost assists The Batman later in the series. (It is possible in this world of comics that Strange faked his death and spectral appearances, but heaven help the writer who tries to bring Strange back if his story doesn't match this one.) At the point of his death, Hugo Strange's spirit rises and advances.

Thorne is Strange's opposite. Everyone else in the series, whether hero, villain, or everyday citizen, recognizes The Batman's moral stature. In sharp contrast with Len Wein's Batman/Ra's al Ghul **"Bat-Murderer"** series, here we are informed that the Gotham citizenry remain loyal to their costumed guardian despite Thorne's efforts. But to Thorne, The Batman is merely a nuisance who can be disposed of either by repressive laws or by brute force. What Thorne does to Strange is the key to how his mind works. It also shows his lack of any sense of humor. The people's continued faith in Batman demonstrates that Thorne does not represent the citizenry at all, while The Batman functions as their servant and protector. Thorne's inability to perceive what The Batman is illustrates his total lack of imagination, constrasting him sharply with the other villains. Moreover, he is a vulgar, petty tyrant who does not even know what the depths of evil really are; no wonder his meeting with the satanic Joker leaves him terrified. What Thorne has done in opposing The Batman is close to ***hubris***. He has overreached himself by involving himself with forces he cannot hope to control, and as in myth, supernatural forces bring about the overreacher's comeuppance. Thorne is haunted by the ghost of Hugo Strange and his smug self-confidence deteriorates into panic. Significantly, Thorne does not end up dead but totally insane. His has been


"Englehart. . .contrasts Thorne with Silver."
I DON'T HAVE TO STAND FOR THIS!
YOUNG LADY, I'M DUE SOME RESPECT! I'M THE PRESIDENT OF THE--
NOBODY WHO PUTS THE BATMAN DOWN IS DUE ANYTHING! I BET YOU'RE BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN TO HAVE HIM THROWN OUT OF TOWN!
©1981 DC Comics
STEVE ADAMS '81
Character ©1981 DC Comics
THORNE, THAT ONE MAN HAS GIVEN HIS LIFE TO GOTHAM--THE CITY, THE PEOPLE--HE'S OUR AVENGING ANGEL!
THEY SAY NOBODY CARES ABOUT THE CITY ANY MORE, BUT HE DOES! HE--
©1981 DC Comics
7

the tale of the descent and degeneration of a spirit.

Englehart thus pairs and contrasts Thorne with Strange, but he also contrasts Thorne with Silver. She enters Bruce Wayne's life in the Englehart/Simonson stories as an under-characterized high society beauty. There seems nothing unusual about her. But, in the Rogers stories, as she and Wayne fall more deeply in love with each other, she senses that there is more to him than he wishes to reveal. Her perceptiveness worries Wayne, who reflects that before Silver, he had always prevented himself from becoming too emotionally involved with women for fear they would see what his true self is. Englehart has Wayne tell us what has long been implicit in the series: Bruce Wayne has become a disguise for The Batman. It is The Batman who is this man's essential self, not the identity he was born with. Thus we have several secret identity hunts going on in this series. Strange finds out who and what Batman is. The Joker and Penguin would like to find out who he is, but, as The Penguin admits, it doesn't really matter. Perhaps it's because they know what kind of man he is and that is all they need to know in order to fight him. The unimaginative Thorne knows Wayne personally, but never comes close to uncovering his secret. Silver discovers the truth without having to unmask Batman as Strange does. In the stunning conclusion to the ***"Deadshot"*** story, her insight into the man she loves causes her to recognize him even behind the grim, threatening mask and facial expression of The Batman.

At first her discovery frightens her. There follows in the next issue an extraordinary scene in which The Batman invades Silver's bedroom, supposedly to question her about Deadshot but in fact in order to find out if, as he suspects, she knows who he is. The two, formerly so intimate with each other, now fence verbally, each concealing the truth that the other already knows. The Batman handles the situation more serenely, long accustomed to his life of guarding secrets. He is in full costume; she, the more emotionally vulnerable of the two, wears only a towel, appropriately, since she can barely hide her tension and fear in the encounter. As soon as The Batman departs, she flees, unable to cope with the situation. How should she, the story asks, respond to what The Batman is?

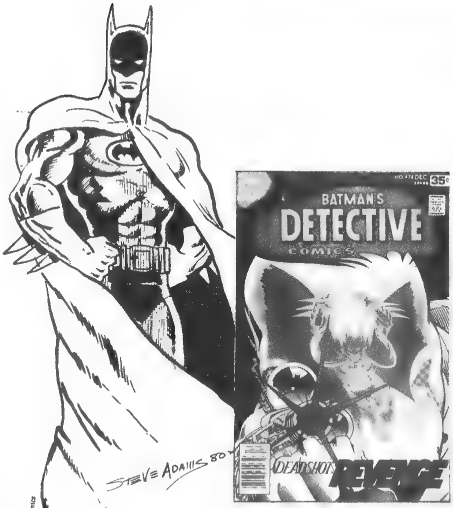
As authorial manipulation would have it, her car breaks down and she is picked up by Thorne, who is also fleeing a moral challenge he cannot handle: a nemesis avenging his crimes in the form of Hugo Strange's ghost. Here follows the key scene of the entire Englehart series, as Thorne and Silver debate their conflicting views of The Batman. Thorne remains as obtuse as ever, continuing to see him only as a meddler in city affairs. Rising to

the challenge, Silver shakes off her past fears and stalwartly defends The Batman as Gotham's "avenging angel," risking his life repeatedly for their benefit. Furious, Thorne ejects her from the car. Each has reached a moral turning point; their final decisions have been made. Silver returns to Gotham and to The Batman. Thorne drives on into the waiting arms of Strange's ghost and spiritual death.

Silver arrives to find a storm raging, mirroring the furious battle she witnesses between Batman and The Joker, sanity and madness, idealism and savagery. It ends with The Joker swallowed up by the river—the bomb defused for a while—and she comes to another decision. She can now accept The Batman as a person she can love, and not simply as a hero she admires but somehow fears, but she cannot join him in the life he leads. She knows her limits: she could not bear being his wife or lover when she knows that he may be killed in his very next battle. (Interestingly, simultaneously in ***JUSTICE LEAGUE*** Englehart was showing us how very deeply the married pair of superheroes, Hawkman and Hawkgirl cared for one another and needed to be together.) Silver St. Cloud is no super-heroine, but simply a normal human being, like the reader, and finds she must break off her relationship with The Batman. And yet we are made to realize it took tremendous fortitude for Silver to make this decision. Hers is a level of heroism that is lesser than The Batman's, but it is heroism all the same. Her spirit too rose and advanced through adversity.

And The Batman? He clearly is wracked with emotional pain over the breakup. It may be that this was the closest he will ever come to success in love. But the final panel shows him swooping off over the city as he too survives life's troubles and persists in his mission.

That final full-page panel was another stirring example of the magnificent artwork of penciller Marshall Rogers and inker Terry Austin throughout these six issues. Their work on



A LOVER'S SPAT! OUR FIRST! THIS IS GETTING SERIOUS!
IT'S BEGINNING TO REALLY MATTER WHAT SHE THINKS OF ME!
AND YET--
©1981 DC Comics

--SHE DOESN'T REALLY KNOW ME--NOT INSIDE! THERE'S A PART OF ME SHE CAN'T, EVER, KNOW!
ALWAYS, THE SAME PROBLEM-- EVER SINCE THE FIRST GIRL I LOVED, JULIE MADISON!*
THEY LOVE BRUCE WAYNE--

SOON, THE NEXT DAY! AS A 24-HOUR TOWN, GOTHAM CITY SEES ITS RESIDENTS KEEP TO ALL SORTS OF SCHEDULES BESIDES THE TYPICAL 9-TO-5... BUT ONLY THE RICH AND THE FREE-LANCE KEEP THE HOURS BRUCE WAYNE KEEPS!
BRUCE! HI!
SILVER, MY DEAR, ONLY FOR YOU WOULD I GET UP AT THE CRACK OF DAWN!
©1981 DC Comics

A typical Marshall Rogers street scene: "[Rogers' Batman work] recaptured the look the series had when it first started nearly forty years before: the omnipresence of the darkness and shadows, the grim aura about the hero, the grotesquerie of the villains...but Rogers' style also incorporated the power, fluidity, and even glamor associated with the Batman art of the 1970s."

Batman recaptured the look the series had when it first started nearly forty years before: the omnipresence of darkness and shadows, the grim aura about the hero, the grotesquerie of the villains, and the inescapable sensation of eeriness. But Rogers' style also incorporated the power, fluidity and even glamor associated with the Batman art of the 1970s. The depiction of various characters, for example, blended a more contemporary realism with a stylization reminiscent of an earlier phase of comics art. Rogers recreated the look of the 1930s in the style of the 1970s.

At first Rogers' covers for ***DETECTIVE*** were comparatively bland, but his cover for #474 may be the most stunningly dramatic comics cover I've ever seen. Batman hurtles towards his prey, his cape outstretched to form two black bat's wings, his hands poised as if to seize his target. But although The Batman seems to be hurtling towards the reader, he is not, for we see him somehow reflected in the all-concealing mask of Deadshot, in extreme close-up. We see nothing of Deadshot's face; the blank mask makes him look somehow inhuman. But we do see a large yellow lens where one of his eyes should be, with a gun held up to it, which fires in a brilliant explosion, which is matched by a small white one on the Batman's right shoulder. The end of the pursuit, the firing of the weapon, and the striking of the bullet are all fused into one powerfully dramatic image.

In the cover to #476, we see Batman standing majestically above three corpses, with a storm, complete with lightning, raging about them. The corpses all bear unnerving death's-head grins upon their faces; so too does The Batman himself. And within the blackness inside his swirling cape we read the words that explain the horror we see: ***"The Sign of the Joker."***

Then consider the wealth of unforgettable images Rogers scattered throughout his six issues with Englehart: Batman caught atop a roof between two of Hugo Strange's gigantic mutated men, The Batman almost wholly in black shadows, pointing accusingly at the disguised Strange; Strange's insanely triumphant face as he pulls off a Bruce Wayne mask on #472's splash page; Alfred's look of defiance as he vows to guard his master; the weird tableau of Strange onstage auctioning off the Batman's secret identity, and three shadowy (but recognizable) figures tossing their bids to the floor; The Penguin's intentionally theatrical entrance, pulling back a curtain; the wide shot of a busy, intensely alive Midtown Gotham street at the start of one of Bruce and Silver's dates; The Batman's battle in the fog with Thorne's thugs; The Joker's entrance in #475, in which one picture captured perfectly the essence of the character; the demoniacal face of the cat The Joker employs in a murder; the appearance and attack by Strange's "hitch-hiking" ghost along a deserted road. Rogers' art could become overly stylized and confusing, as in the page dealing with the Joker's seeming demise, but at other times he could show how to handle difficult situations masterfully, as in most of the lengthy "talking heads" sequences of Silver's and Thorne's debate in the car. Finally, consider the variety of moods Rogers so superbly evoked in his renditions of the key scenes between Batman/Bruce and Silver: the passion of their reunion after the incident with Strange, the uncertainty and suspicion in their luncheon discussion, Silver's shock on recognizing The Batman as Bruce Wayne, the tension of their first subsequent encounter, and the melancholy of their farewell.

Englehart and Rogers have now virtually given up mainstream comics work. That is a shame, although it is hard to see how they could have topped their past achievement together on ***DETECTIVE***. It certainly would be nice to find out. But right now we must be content with those six classic issues. They weren't "just" comics; they were art.

DRAGONSLAYER

by Kurt Olsson

Once upon a time, Walt Disney was the king of the fantasy movie makers, and a new fantasy movie from the empire he built always seemed to live up to the expectations of both children and adults. As with childhood, no one wanted to see those magical days end, but film makers like George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, by successfully bringing their own childhood fantasies to the screen, have finally laid to rest any ideas about Disney's unchallengeable preeminence in the fantasy film field. With Disney Studios' recent spate of uninspired films which either rehashed old Disney formulas (as in the ***"Love Bug"*** movies) or copied, rather than built upon, the current fantasy fashions (as in ***THE BLACK HOLE***), Disney Productions has been forced to realize a return to its former glory can only be accomplished by capturing the energy and freshness of its classic films, not by retreading them. Releasing both ***THE FOX AND THE HOUND*** and ***DRAGONSLAYER*** in a Summer which has seen a preponderance of fantasy films, Disney Productions is making its greatest bid to regain the throne it once held. The question which must come to mind after watching the premiere screening of ***DRAGONSLAYER*** is whether this bid is strong enough to rival the likes of Lucas & Spielberg's ***RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK***.

A good question, but since a film should be allowed to first succeed or fail on its own merits, I will analyze the film before answering that question directly.

When Disney Productions and Paramount Pictures decided to give Hal Barwood and Matthew Robbins a chance to make ***DRAGONSLAYER***, the first problem the pair of screen writers had to address was that of making the world of Galen (the hero), Valerian (the heroine), and Vermithrax (the dragon and villain) real. In any fantasy-related venture, the fantastic must be juxtaposed with enough of the real world so that the viewer can willingly suspend his disbelief, to paraphrase Coleridge's famous quote. In ***DRAGONSLAYER***, Barwood and Robbins set their story in the mythical land of Urland, basing this world on sixth century England—an apt choice when one remembers the real life Arthur, himself the basis for a few sorcerous legends, battled the Saxons less than a century before this time. By researching that period of British history and culture, the film makers

©1981 Paramount Pictures Corp. & Mark Protosevich and Joe Lederer

tried—and successfully so—to give the viewer a feeling of authenticity. Unlike the romantic legends of Arthur and the Round Table, the world of ***DRAGONSLAYER*** doesn't have bejewelled princesses and knights in fluted shining armor running about. Throughout the film, its producer (Barwood) and its director (Robbins) were careful to avoid the romantic cliches which revolve around this most unromantic time period. For example, the King of Urland rules over a squalid group of huts in the valley, and, instead of inhabiting the usual splendid marble castle, his castle is crudely fashioned out of slabs of stone. Life is simple and hard in the village, too; cloth is coarse, and colors are muted and somber. Even the weather is mostly overcast and dreary, making the landscape more savage and untameable.

Moreover, Barwood and Robbins made the only true sorceror in this movie, Ulrich, less fantastic than most movie images. Ulrich, in fact, is quite pedestrian in the beginning of the film. Rather than performing outlandish miracles (as Merlin does in ***EXCALIBUR***, for example), Ulrich's powers lie more in his intelligence and his careful manipulation of others' superstitions to make his power appear more magnificent. After Valerian's expedition is allowed into Ulrich's keep, Craggenmore, they don't see, as the movie viewer does, that the robe and helm the magician dons are rather beat up and moth eaten, and although Ulrich's entrance, in a puff of smoke, impresses Valerian and her group, both Galen and the audience know this "magic" only came about because Galen threw sulphur at his master's back. Even at the end, despite the great power Ulrich wields, it is his cunning which wins the day for mortals. More on the ending later, though.

Making a fantasy world seem real to an audience, especially in a film including a forty-foot dragon in its cast, also involves smoothly blending live action and special effects into a cohesive whole. From Galen practicing his magic by suspending an egg in the air, to dragon young feasting on giblets of fresh virgin, to flames burning on Fire Lake, the special effects in ***DRAGONSLAYER*** are superb. Unlike the seams in the coarse garments the cast wears throughout the film, the seam between flesh and blood and clay and metal construct is almost too tightly knit to be seen. The climactic battle between the last outposts of sorcery, Vermithrax and Ulrich, more than proves this claim. In this special effects extravaganza, one sees Vermithrax breath fire, fly like no X-Wing fighter ever could, and finally explode before the audience's bedazzled eyes. Four million dollars—a quarter of the film's budget—was spent on making sure that Vermithrax stands, walks, and flies correctly, and except for some of the early silohouette shots (when the dragon looks too stiff), the money appears to have done the job.

Galen learns from his master (Sir Ralph Richardson).

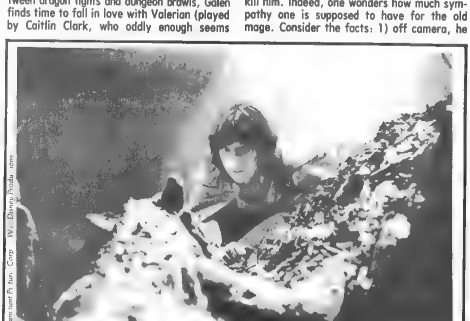
But I don't believe the money was necessary well spent. For years, before special effects magic became so important to a film's success, Disney Productions was the master of another type of magic—the magical bond between a character and his/her audience. Films like ***SNOW WHITE*** and ***PINOCCHIO*** wouldn't be the classics they are considered today if the Disney people hadn't known how important a sympathetic audience is. Unfortunately, in ***DRAGONSLAYER***, one is never really given an opportunity to develop an emotional attachment to any of the characters.

Engaging an audience's emotions is extremely important in heroic fantasy. Since the hero's struggle is the core of the story line, the audience must be made to feel sympathy for the hero, or the struggle becomes nothing more than a glorified boxing match. One possible way of giving an audience a chance to care for the protagonist is to reveal the character's motivations. In ***DRAGONSLAYER***, Galen (played by Peter MacNicol, whose wooden expressions don't help to bring his character alive on screen) decides to rid Urland of the dragon. Why he wishes to accomplish this goal is never revealed. If he travels to Urland to have revenge for his master's death, this motivating factor is refuted later when Galen expresses remorse upon killing Tyrian, the huntsman who "killed" Ulrich. If, as circumstances seem to dictate, he goes to Urland to prove himself as a mage, this brashness (which is evidenced by the pranks he plays on Hodge) isn't consistent with the bumbling and loyally modest Galen one sees in the opening of the film. In fact, one never learns firsthand how the death of his master affects Galen; after Ulrich's death, the scene almost immediately switches to Galen traipsing through the woods. Gray areas, such as those just mentioned, are opportunities which Barwood and Robbins missed at more fully developing the personality of their lead character.

Another way of developing character is to reveal character through action. Again, this film falls short in illustrating character because the dramatic action takes the place of, rather than enhances, character. In between dragon fights and dungeon brawls, Galen finds time to fall in love with Valerian (played by Caitlin Clark, who oddly enough seems more convincing as a soft-voiced man, than a young woman learning about love). Since one hardly ever sees them converse together, the depth of their love should be doubted, especially since Valerian believes Galen could fall in love with the Princess of Urland, even though he only meets the princess once for a matter of moments. This lack of sufficient character interaction, except when plot acceleration expressly calls for it (Valerian's father revealing the spear, Dragonslayer, is an example which comes to mind), inhibits the growth of the film's characters—especially in the protagonist's case—denying them a chance to become more three-dimensional and, therefore, more real and engaging.

Since heroic fantasy revolves around the final struggle between hero and foe, the hero's decision to fight to the death is vital in strengthening the hero's character, because it reveals the ideals and attitudes he holds dear.

The problem with ***DRAGONSLAYER*** is the hero really doesn't make his heroic choice in the climactic scene. The climax of Galen's evolution (however small) of character takes place in the scene preceding the film's climax. In Galen's climax, he decides to face the dragon alone, with only a spear. By making this decision to risk his life, Galen has grown from the merry prankster into a responsible hero. The last scene, on the other hand, cannot be considered the true climax as Galen is concerned, since in this scene he is forced into making a choice when there is really only one choice. Through the series of events leading up to his magical battle with the dragon, Ulrich (played with a nice touch of wit by Sir Ralph Richardson) gives Galen no alternative but to kill him. Indeed, one wonders how much sympathy one is supposed to have for the old mage. Consider the facts: 1) off camera, he



Caitlin Clark, as Valerian, faces a disgusting Dragonlet in her quest to fashion a shield out of dragon scales to protect Galen.

a scene from the *DRAGONSLAYER* comics adaptation.

makes sure that Hodge will carry his cremated remains after his death, 2) he commits suicide before his helpless apprentice, and 3) he comes alive at the end of the film after letting his apprentice live through all the danger he otherwise would have had to face. Can it be believed, after his scene-stealing showdown with the dragon, Ulrich couldn't have made, with his physical health, the trip to Urland as Ulrich professes? Or is all Galen goes through to drop the ashes of his master into Fire Lake just a meaningless sideshow before Ulrich takes over in the grand finale? One cannot shake the feeling Galen is being used by Ulrich, which in turn makes the viewer feel he is being used, set up to believe the hero will slay the dragon (both the film and the spear Galen uses are called "Dragonslayer," remember) when someone not seen for most of the film actually does the slaying.

One doubts Barwood or Robbins ever intended the film to rely so much on action, rather than character, though. Throughout the film, the way the village is reacting to the schism between magic and religion is illustrated—sorcerous actions are many times followed by some Christian rite in ***DRAGONSLAYER***. An attempt was made to show the end of magic's epoch. Also, a healthy dose of cynicism, almost never found in Disney productions, exists throughout the film, but is most evident at the end when Galen and Valerian are passing the slain dragon. Nearby, a congregation is thanking God for his striking down the infidel dragon, while below the pair, the king is declaring himself to be the dragon slayer. Although these scenes were not meant as swipes against either of those institutions—especially since the first priest died bravely expounding the ways of God before an uninterested Vermithrax—they reveal that Barwood and Robbins do have the ability to reveal more ambiguous aspects of the human character. The unfortunate thing is that they don't expend this ability on their main characters, and even this fine work is undercut by flaws, such as the appearance of the horse—a white one to boot—in the last few moments of the picture. Naivete is a story's denouement is fine, but sentimental hokeyness is another matter.

Likewise, the Marvel Comics adaptation of ***DRAGONSLAYER*** suffers from the same problems. Since writer Denny O'Neil's adaptation is so faithful to the movie, this can hardly be described as surprising. Using what he was given, O'Neil does a good job—although the scene on the top of page 15 in the Super Special makes one wonder about O'Neil's ideas about love—but, as with every comics adaptation of a movie, the art is what makes the difference. Some adaptations, like Marvel's ***RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK***, suffer because artists like John Buscema don't have styles which mesh with the cinematic approach taken on these books. ***DRAGONSLAYER***'s Marie Severin, though, does an excellent job conveying the dramatics of the story (her art is also enhanced by good Tartaglione inks), and she uses the form's unique ability to slow and freeze time to make some moments in the adaptation more precious than those in the movie. By far the best example of this occurs on page 41, panels 5-7 in the "***Super Special***" when Galen grudgingly kills Tyrian—even the movie can't capture the mood Severin does in those panels. Unfortunately, Marie Severin's talents as a colorist were hurt by the coloring process used by Marvel; almost paradoxically, the color in the four-color comic book looks better than the color in the more expensive slick-paper magazine.

Still, even after reading the well-crafted Marvel Comics adaptation, one wishes Barwood and Robbins had spent less time and money making sure the dragon and special effects were excellent. It is clear by the end of the film that ***DRAGONSLAYER*** is too special effects top-heavy; action dominates the ending and prevents the characters in this film from being as engaging as those in ***RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK***. By neglecting to latch onto the audience's emotions, ***DRAGONSLAYER*** cannot compete on the same level as ***RAIDERS***, but this film is still refreshing enough to be a big step in the right direction for Barwood/Robbins and Disney Productions.

SUPER-TEAM SPIRIT

by Murray R. Ward

THE AVENGERS

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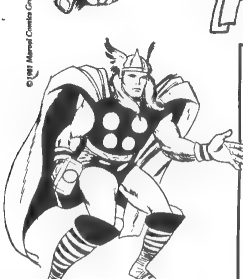


"And there came a day, a day unlike any other, when Earth's mightiest heroes and heroines found themselves united against a common threat. On that day, The Avengers were born—to fight the foes no single super-hero could withstand! Through the years, their roster has prospered, changing many times, but their glory has never been denied! Heed the call, then,—for now, the ***Avengers Assemble!***"

So read the series-explanatory blurb atop the splash page of ***AVENGERS #128***, the first issue to sport such a pronouncement. It constitutes a highly simplified explication for newcomers of what was perhaps the most complicated series of events ever to result in the formation—and continual re-formation—of a super-team in comics.

I. ORIGINS

On the real-world creative side of things, the origin of The Avengers is a simple thing. Where the high sales of The Justice League of America for DC had inspired Marvel to create their own super-team comic in ***FANTASTIC FOUR***, the actual structure of The JLA was mimicked in The Avengers. The FF, after all, was a common-origin team, a quartet of friends who gained their super-powers in the same incident, whereas The JLA, modelled on the earlier Justice Society, was a formulated team composed of individual heroes from other strips; so too were The Avengers. The concept waited until 1963 to premiere in its own title only because Marvel needed the intervening time to create the various heroes who would populate the book, since they had no ready source of Golden Age heroes to revive as did DC. Of their three major stars of the 1940s, Timely/Marvel had already used up The Human Torch as an FF member and The Sub-Mariner as a villain (albeit a noble one) in the same series, leaving only Captain America in limbo... though not, as we shall see, for long.

The lineup of characters in ***AVENGERS #1*** was composed of virtually every unattached super-doer in the then Marvel selection of titles. Of the early Marvel heroes, The FF and The X-Men (the latter of whom made their debut simultaneous with The Avengers) were separate teams on their own, Daredevil had not yet been created, and Sub-Mariner, as mentioned, was not then considered a hero. The original Avengers, then, included everybody else available: Thor (from ***JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY***), Iron Man (from ***TALES OF SUSPENSE***), Ant-Man and The Wasp (from ***TALES TO ASTONISH***), and (from his own cancelled series) The Hulk. The only noticeable absentees were the two Steve Ditko-drawn characters: Spider-Man and Dr. Strange. Spidey was deliberately omitted to preserve his status as the eternal loner, and it would be years later before anyone would try to fit the Master of the Mystic Arts into a super-team—at the time, no one even thought to suggest it. Even as it was, the Marvel creative braintrust of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby seemed to be reaching to find enough heroes for a proper formulated team, as The Avengers as a group were a far more disparate and incongruous melange than any previous such organization. The JLA may have included two extra-terrestrials in their charter membership, but The Avengers boasted a dramatic pagan diety, a misanthropic monster, a robotic-looking gladiator whose powers stem-

BUT SUDDENLY, A RAGING, EAR-SHATTERING, THUNDEROUS CRY RINGS OUT--!!
DROP HER-- IN THE NAME OF THE AVENGERS!!
©1987 Marvel Comics Group

Giant-Man in the penultimate battle of the "old" Avengers. He would leave the group for the shortest amount of time (next to the Wasp).

med from modern technology, and a couple who could have set up housekeeping in a doll's house—strange bedfellows, to be sure.

The ultimate uniqueness of the series was not a product of its beginnings, which were openly derivative, for all the originality displayed in the creation of the individual members, but in a property also mentioned in the blurb quoted at the beginning of this article. For while other formulated teams might regularly draft new members (it was a cause for momentous celebration in comics fandom whenever the early JLA did so), or lose old members for whatever reason (this happened in The JSA whenever a character lost his own strip), changes in their lineup were the exception rather than the rule. Not so The Avengers! Change was to become their watchword, and in fact, no article on this team, this one being no exception, can ever be entirely historically accurate and up-to-date, because it is a near-certainty that the roster will have changed between the article's writing and its publication. (The membership list that accompanies this column is thus a statement of the team's status only up to and including the series of changes instituted in the strip beginning in issue #211.)

The game of super-hero musical chairs began immediately for the heroes whose adopted battle-cry was "Avengers Assemble!" in their second issue. Perhaps wary of being stepped on by his larger and undeniably more powerful new teammates, Ant-Man gained the power to grow as well as shrink in size and became Giant-Man, a hero who, although he was still the group's weakest male member for all his colossal stature, could at least hold his own among the likes of Thor, Hulk, and Iron Man. This was only the first of several changes of name, powers, and costume for Henry Pym, who holds the record as the most confusing crusader in comics; not only did he later become Goliath, and then Yellowjacket, but his discarded identities refused to die, each of them being assumed by another hero, some of whom also sported other alter egos. (For the record, today Scott Lang is Ant-Man II; Bill Foster, formerly Black Goliath, third of the Goliaths, is Giant-Man II; and Clint Barton, who ***was*** Goliath II, is once again Hawkeye.) In the same story, the irascible Hulk, then an argumentative Thing-like tough-guy rather than today's more child-like tantrum-thrower, quit the group, only to return as an antagonist in the following tale. Indeed for a while it looked as if The Avengers' sole ***raison d'etre*** was to capture and/or control the green gargantua. As if all this weren't enough, Iron Man made the first of endless changes in his armored garb, going from the lumbering all-golden suit of the first two issues to the red-and-gold color scheme that prevails today—and thus leaving Thor the only unchanged original member (The Wasp, not to be ignored, began modelling an unceasing array of outfits, a fashion parade which continues to the present).

An aura of stability temporarily overtook the group in the fourth issue when they inadvertantly revived the aforementioned last remaining missing-in-action Timely Comics character, Captain America. In one of the most-retold classics in comics history, Cap was found floating in an ice floe in suspended animation and awoke to relate the sad tale of the demise of his teen-age partner of World War II, Bucky, before accepting The Avengers' offer to join them as the Hulk's replacement. With their monstrous member out (after a gigantic brouhaha in ***FF #25-26*** in which he protested his quick replacement, and a subsequent guest-shot in ***AVENGERS #5***), and the altogether human and basically non-super-powered Cap in, The Avengers became somehow more acceptable to the general public, many of whom remembered the good Captain from the 1940s. The stability was not to last, but it did so long enough for the Avengers to create at least some semblance of formal....

II. ORGANIZATION

Like many formulated teams, The Avengers had no set leader. Rather, it was decided that the chairmanship of meetings should be a revolving duty. Thor and Cap in particular looked impressive banging the gavel, and Giant-Man and The Wasp also took their turns, but unbeknownst to his teammates, it was Iron Man who did most by way of formalizing the alliance. As Tony Stark, he donated his ancestral townhouse as the group's meeting place; now known as Avengers Mansion, it is a super-hero headquarters second only to the Baxter Building penthouse of The Fantastic Four. The HQ's eventual array of security devices were also of Stark design, as were the various flying craft, notably the powerful quinjets, which came into use in later stories. Finally, Stark was the principal bankroller of the team, providing them even with the services of the butler, Jarvis, to maintain the mansion, and it was surely his influence with the government and the later S.H.I.E.L.D.

organization that resulted in the issuance of the Avenger A-1 Priority security status, complete with ID cards that allowed the bearer (even non-members like Hulk and Cap sidekick Rick Jones) access even into the Oval Office, if need be.

The Avengers got their act together *vis-a-vis* the powers-that-be just in time, as it turned out, because with their 16th issue, the most all-consuming change yet would overtake the team. Affairs in immortal Asgard had been claiming more and more of the Thunder God's attention, to the exclusion of his Avengers participation and even of his personal life as Dr. Don Blake, and abruptly, in the wake of a particularly Homeric battle with Zemo's Masters of Evil (#15), Thor vanished completely with only the briefest of explanations. (It should be noted, by the way, that in place of chasing the Hulk across the country, the team's primary activities were now the foiling of plots by the future-villain, Kang, who was to become their arch-nemesis, and by Zemo, the ex-Nazi responsible for Bucky's demise, who gathered about him the assemblers' greatest enemies to form his own anti-Avengers squad. The above mentioned battle ended the struggle with Zemo (who died in the climax) though not with The Masters of Evil, who continued to return over the years with a membership as changeable as our heroes'.) Cap and Rick Jones became separated from the rest of the group at the same time, and by the time they managed to wind their way back to the New York mansion, Iron Man, Giant-Man, and The Wasp, in their absence, had elected to take leaves-of-absence from the group and had initiated a trio of reformed super-villains as their successors. Thus, the once-newest member, Captain America, instantly found himself—by virtue of seniority—the leader and senior member of a coterie of far younger and less powerful heroes than his original comrades: Hawkeye the Marksman, archery-skilled antagonist of several Iron Man thrillers; Quicksilver, silver-haired mutant with the power of super-speed; and The Scarlet Witch, a hex-caster who, together

Thor, one of the Avengers' founding members, and Loki, the Avengers' "founder."
©1981 Marvel Comics Group
ONCE AGAIN, LOKI, MOST DANGEROUS OF THE NORSE GODS, RETURNS TO GIVE THE MIGHTY THOR HIS GREATEST CHALLENGE!!
PLOT STAN LEE
SCRIPT L.D. LIEBER
ART JACK KIRBY
INKING DICK AYERS
LETTERING ART SIMEK

with her brother Quicksilver, had battled The X-Men as part of Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. The Avengers suddenly were no longer an established formulated team, but an all-new, unproven hybrid team composed of heroes who, while they shared no common origin, did not each have their own strip either. (For most of this period, Cap's fledgling strip in ***SUSPENSE*** concentrated on flashback WW II adventures, so it could be said that he too had no present-day strip, other than the ***AVENGERS*** book.)

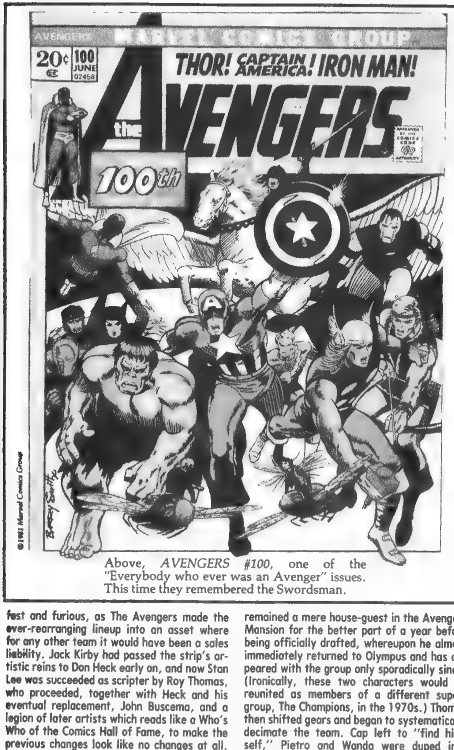
The so-called "New Avengers" took the series from a casebook approach of the joint adventures of "Earth's Mightiest Heroes" (as The Avengers were billed before and after this period) to a more character-oriented strip, like FF and ***X-MEN*** had become. Captain America's search for a present-day identity; Hawkeye's feuding with Cap over his handling of the leadership duties; Quicksilver's over-protectiveness of his sister; and The Scarlet Witch's unspoken admiration of Cap (who was only one of several possible suitors Wanda went through—unlike her one-boyfriend Marvel "sisters"—before her successful romance with The Vision)—these were the stuff of which the reworked strip was made.

But even this was not to last. The old members had not quit for good, and they turned up to help out when needed—first The Wasp and Hank Pym (now renamed Goliath) on a permanent basis, and later Iron Man and Thor as infrequent guests. As if there were some unspoken rule against having two females on the regular roster at once, whenever Goliath and The Wasp showed up, Quicksilver and The Scarlet Witch were missing, and vice versa. The only stability in the group was provided, once again, by leader Captain America.

At this point, the changes started coming

©1981 Marvel Comics Group
BOY, ARE WE GLAD TO SEE YOU, YOU OL' SHIELD-SPINNIN' SCALLYWAG!
AWOH THERE, BIG BOY! I APPRECIATE YOUR ENTHUSIASM, BUT--
--I'D BE JUST AS IMPRESSED BY A HARMONIOUS CHORUS, LET ME DOWN BEFORE YOU END UP WITH AN AIR-SICK AVENGER!
EASY BLUE EYES, IF YOU SHOULD WIN, YOU MAY LOSE BUT OUR VACATION!
SAY, YOU THE O.G. COMRADESHIP FROM THE FEAR AND DISTRUST OF THE EVIL MUTANTS
HOW DIFFERENT IS THE O.G. COMRADESHIP FROM THE FEAR AND DISTRUST OF THE EVIL MUTANTS
I'LL BE MOST HAPPY HERE IN THE COMPANY OF ADVENTURERS SUCH AS THESE, MY SISTER!
I FEEL NO SHALL BE MOST HAPPY HERE IN THE COMPANY OF ADVENTURERS SUCH AS THESE, MY SISTER!

The making of the "New Avengers," from *AVENGERS #16*. "The magazine became a more character-oriented strip..."



Above, *AVENGERS #100*, one of the "Everybody who ever was an Avenger" issues. This time they remembered the Swordsman.

fast and furious, as The Avengers made the ever-rearranging lineup into an asset where for any other team it would have been a sales liability. Jack Kirby had passed the strip's artistic reins to Don Heck early on, and now Stan Lee was succeeded as scripter by Roy Thomas, who proceeded, together with Heck and his eventual replacement, John Buscema, and a legion of later artists which reads like a Who's Who of the Comics Hall of Fame, to make the previous changes look like no changes at all. Rather than send different members on temporary wild goose chases so as to concentrate on a central core of four or five characters, Thomas involved Cap, Hawkeye, Pietro, Wanda, Hank, and Jan in every story, throwing in guest-stars like The Black Widow and Hercules for good measure. In a surprising series of developments, these last two were *not* immediately signed up as members: The Widow, after a lengthy involvement with the group, declined a proferred membership only to join very briefly years later, while Hercules remained a mere house-guest in the Avengers Mansion for the better part of a year before being officially drafted, whereupon he almost immediately returned to Olympus and has appeared with the group only sporadically since. (Ironically, these two characters would be reunited as members of a different supergroup, The Champions, in the 1970s.) Thomas than shifted gears and began to systematically decimate the team. Cap left to "find himself," Pietro and Wanda were duped into rejoining Magneto for a time, and the three weakest members (Hawkeye, Wasp, and a temporarily de-powered Goliath) were left holding the fort... and the bag. By this time, however, The Avengers, no matter their roster, had become a tradition, and there would be no thought of disbanding permanently, although as Hawkeye suggested, "Maybe we ought to launch a door-to-door membership drive!"

The new members came slowly. Cap nominated The Black Panther (an ally of The Fantastic Four) as his replacement, and he was eagerly accepted; The Vision, the android hero whose personal history is nearly as complicated as that of his creative "godfather," Hank Pym, made his first appearance and was signed up immediately; and, finally, the third in a series of Black Knights was offered the coveted A-1 Priority card—although his residence in England precluded his involvement in most cases. With a decent number of heroic protagonists once again, Thomas spent the remainder of his reign on the title playing with the relationships between the extant members: Hank and Hawkeye exchanged identities, even as Hank and Jan exchanged marital vows; Wanda's name became more frequently linked with that of her would-be paramour, The Vision, than with that of brother Quicksilver; Cap took on a guesting status similar to that of Thor and Iron Man, returning the group to its round-robin system of chairman-selection; and the team as a whole became involved in the magnum opus super-hero adventure of the decade, the Kree-Skrull Intergalactic War.

As interesting as the roll call of Avengers membership, past and present, is the list of heroes who have been requested to join the team, and have declined. In their first active hunt for prospective members in #16, the group tried to enlist Prince Namor, but the Sub-Mariner's hostilities with the surface race had not yet been resolved (and remain unresolved even today) and thus he was reluctant to ally himself with an American superteam, despite his 1940s experiences with The Invaders and All-Winners Squad, and his later grudging "membership" in The Defenders. The newly-formed "New Avengers" of #17 attempted fruitlessly to get The Hulk back on the squad (a hopeless endeavor at best, since without Thor or Iron Man they had no one capable of controlling his rampages). Spider-Man was nominated for induction in his third Annual, but the fates conspired to keep him alone, as they had when he had endeavored to join The Fantastic Four at the start of his career and when, shortly after this encounter with The Avengers, The X-Men tried to sign him up. Although Rick Jones participated in virtually every early adventure of the team, he was never awarded full membership, or even the honorary membership accorded his JLA counterpart Snapper Carr. Likewise Captain Marvel, for all that his participation was the catalyst of The Avengers' involvement in the Kree-Skrull War, never officially joined the group. Daredevil and The Black Widow, at the time of their partnership, were offered places in the ranks in return for their aid against Magneto, but while The Widow tried the avenging life briefly, DD declined, since his radar-senses could not function as well when surrounded by a group of comrades as when working alone. Almost every Marvel hero and heroine has made a guest-appearance in the pages of the awesome assemblers' magazine, whether for the purpose of trial membership or merely to aid the group with their more specialized knowledge of the problem at hand (as was the case, ultimately, with Captain Marvel and the Kree-Skrull war).

The rotating leadership of the team provides not a few conundrums. Whereas the chairman's post rotated during the tenure of the original team, and whereas Captain America was sole leader of his experienced campadres thereafter, the status of the gavel-wielder remained uncertain for some time in the late 1960s. Joint gatherings of the "old" and "new" teams, such as in ***AVENGERS ANNUAL #1***, would be presided over by Cap, as the only member of both versions of the group, but while other newer members, such as The Vision and The Panther, were seen to take the lead in later issues, still others, like Hawkeye, were never seen to declare so much as an adjournment for coffee.

One duty that has been equally shared is the manning of the monitors: when the team is inactive, one member at least is always stationed at the mansion in case of an emergency; when all members are involved in a case, this duty is left to loyal Jarvis.

Needless to say, since The Avengers in effect comprise not one super-team, but several interchangeable rosters of super-teams, any discussion of their group dynamics could easily grow to book-length. Whatever the membership, however, the book has retained its popularity over the years, under several different creative staffs, by its continual revivification—one simply cannot say, "I don't like The Avengers," if only because the statement invites the question, "Which Avengers?" This comics fan has always greatly enjoyed the series, however, simply because of all the super-teams, The Avengers best typify the reason (as stated in my introduction to this series) that I favor the super-team strip as high fantasy: the fact that—despite their differences and dissimilarities, despite the fact that a much more cohesive group of principals gathered together in "real life" could never hope to function smoothly as a unit—The Avengers, composed as they are of Earthlings and Asgardians, Olympians and aliens, mutants and androids, reformed villains and heroes from cultures as diverse as America, Europe, and Africa, heroines who are further from the usual cookie-cutter copies of one another than any others in comics, heroes who owe their existences to the machinations of villains, and heroes who have died and been reborn at a later date, can come together when the need arises and battle successfully for the right as a team, as well as maintaining mainly friendly relations with each other on a social basis.

Unreal? Definitely!

Avengers Assemble!? You bet!

III. MEMBERSHIP

THE AVENGERS

Founded: AVENGERS #1

1. THOR (Dr. Donald Blake)

2. THE HULK (Dr. Robert Bruce Banner)
   Quits: AVENGERS #2
   see also DEFENDERS

3. IRON MAN (Anthony Stark)

4. ANT-MAN I, GIANT-MAN I, GOLIATH I, YELLOWJACKET (Henry J. Pym)
   see also DEFENDERS (as YELLOWJACKET)

5. THE WASP (Janet Van Dyne Pym)
   see also DEFENDERS, LADY LIBERATORS

6. CAPTAIN AMERICA (Steve Rogers)
   Joins: AVENGERS #4
   see also INVADERS

7. HAWKEYE, GOLIATH II (Clint Barton)
   Joins: AVENGERS #16
   see also DEFENDERS

8. QUICKSILVER (Pietro Frank)
   see also INHUMANS, BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS

I KNOW, GROUP SOMETHING JUST OCCURRED TO ME: THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN AVENGERS HISTORY THAT ALL OF US HERE WENT INTO ACTION TOGETHER!
BUT NOTHING FROM THE RESULTS IS SAYING WE SHOULD DO IT MORE OFTEN!
HENRY PYM SPOKE OF US AS A TEAM—THOUGH HERCULES HATH EVER WALKED ALONE!
YET, I KNOW OF NO BEINGS—EITHER GODS OR MORTALS—OF WHOSE FRIENDSHIP I AM MORE PROUD!
THEN, LET'S MAKE IT OFFICIAL!
I MOVE THAT THE AVENGERS CONTINUE TO MEET EN MASSE FROM HITHER TO TIME
HOW ABOUT IT, CAP? YOU'RE STILL ACTING CHAIRMAN OF THIS NUTS COMPANY!
SHELLHEAD JUST CALLED FOR A VOTE. SO, LET'S GET WITH IT!
NO NEED, PARTNER. I KNOW A CONSENSUS WHEN I SEE ONE!
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9. THE SCARLET WITCH (Wanda Frank)
Joins: AVENGERS #16
see also LADY LIBERATORS, BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS

10. HERCULES (uses alias "Mr. Powers")
Joins: AVENGERS #45
see also CHAMPIONS

11. THE BLACK PANTHER (T'Challa, son of T'Chaka; Luke Charles)
Joins: AVENGERS #52

12. THE VISION
Joins: AVENGERS #58
see also INVADERS, ALL-WINNERS SQUAD (both as Human Torch)

13. THE BLACK KNIGHT III (Dane Whitman)
Joins: AVENGERS #71
see also DEFENDERS

14. THE BLACK WIDOW (Natasha Alianovna Romanoff)
Joins: AVENGERS #112
see also LADY LIBERATORS, CHAMPIONS

15. THE SWORDSMAN (Kevin White?)
Joins: AVENGERS #114. Dies: GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #2
see also BATROC'S BRIGADE, LETHAL LEGION, other unnamed villain teams

16. MANTIS
Joins: GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #4

17. MOONDRAGON (Heather Douglas)
Joins: AVENGERS #137 (probationary), #151 (standby)
see also DEFENDERS

18. THE BEAST (Henry P. C. McCoy)
Joins: AVENGERS #137 (probationary), #151 (permanent)
see also X-MEN

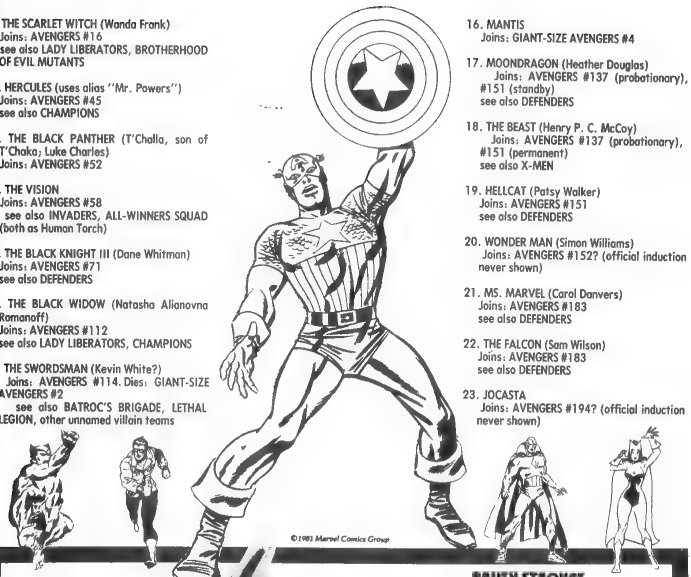
19. HELLCAT (Patsy Walker)
Joins: AVENGERS #151
see also DEFENDERS

20. WONDER MAN (Simon Williams)
Joins: AVENGERS #152? (official induction never shown)

21. MS. MARVEL (Carol Danvers)
Joins: AVENGERS #183
see also DEFENDERS

22. THE FALCON (Sam Wilson)
Joins: AVENGERS #183
see also DEFENDERS

23. JOCASTA
Joins: AVENGERS #194? (official induction never shown)



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Catch a Rising STARR

by Donna Ugel

HOWEVER, THE LAST 40 YEARS HAVEN'T BEEN ALL BAD... I'M STILL YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL... I HAVE THE MAN I LOVE, MY STARR TWINKLE... MY JOB, AND...
NO SCARS FROM ALL THOSE CLOSE SHAVES.
I EVEN KEPT MY WAISTLINE...
Rob Messick
9-28

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One of the attractions of vacation trips when I was a child was the chance to read the comic sections of out-of-town newspapers, which carried different comic strips than the local papers. Most of these "foreign" strips were soon forgotten. However, I still remember going through a particular Sunday section in a roadside restaurant, largely because of a drawing in one of the strips. It showed an exotically-garbed woman lounging around on cushions, and was drawn in a frilly style reminiscent of paper dolls and fairy tales—the sort of style I relished as a little girl. The woman was confidently stating that she had a plan that would succeed against Brenda Starr.

Since our local papers did not carry ***BRENDA STARR***, that one glimpse was all I had of that strip until the late 1970s, when I started geting the ***CHICAGO TRIBUNE*** (for the sake of their comics, of course). As an adult, in addition to the frilly artwork and the fantasy archetypes of ***BRENDA STARR, REPORTER***, I relish the absurd plots and gonzo situations which belie ***BRENDA***'s conventional adventure-strip format.

BRENDA STARR began its run in June of 1940. The comic strip portrayed the professional and romantic adventures of a 23-year-old female reporter working in the male-dominated journalism field. Brenda was challenged to prove herself by taking assignments that were too tough for the male reporters on her paper, ***THE FLASH***. Her situation paralleled that of her creator, Dale Messick, who is a female cartoonist in the male-dominated comics field. When Messick (who deliberately chose the gender-neutral name "Dale" to cope with the prejudices of the industry) recently retired from the art chores (she still writes the strip), Ramona Fradon, a likewise accomplished woman cartoonist, was chosen as successor.

The strip does not exist as a feminist soapbox, however, for the realistic germinal attitude is overwhelmed by the absurdities that are a key part of the strip's attractiveness. For example, there was the time Brenda was arrested for murder and was freed when a little girl proved to the police that the murderer was actually Tiny Tembo, an elephant. The elephant had killed his victim by holding her underwater in her sunken Roman bath until she drowned. There is also the more recent case of Slipper Veil, a sexy disco singer who left her spike-heeled slippers tied to the chairs of attractive men, with a note promising a "reward" (wink, leer) if the finder would return her slipper to her. It looked like Slipper was successfully seducing Basil St. John, Brenda's "mystery man" and husband. Brenda was suffering in the best romantic fashion, when it was revealed that Slipper Veil was actually Slippery St. John, Basil's nephew, who had a talent for singing in drag.

The absurdities are not just limited to the

BRENDA STARR
NO SOONER DOES BASIL LEAVE TO RETURN THE SLIPPER, THAN BRENDA THROWS HERSELF ON THE BED.. SOBBING...
I JUST DON'T GET IT!
YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO!
©1981 Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate
SOB
..THE MALE OF THE SPECIES NEVER DOES UNDERSTAND THE FEMALE.. NEVER!
Dale Messick 11-30
LATER..
POOR BRENDA!
SOMETIMES I'M GLAD I'M NOT MARRIED TO THE MAN I LOVE. I DON'T THINK I COULD TAKE IT!
ME NEITHER.. BUT IT MUST BE GLORIOUS. SUFFERING!

The story progression technique of *BRENDA STARR* is just as distinctive as its art style. Plot progression is subjugated to characters' commentary—sometimes to the exclusion of plot altogether.

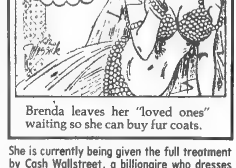
plots—the entire tone of the strip is a freewheeling exercise in fantasy. For instance, everyone in the strip spends most of his/her/its time talking about Brenda. The "city room gang" wonders where Brenda is, what she'll do next, how she'll cope with her latest problem, or how long it will take her to enchant her next male. This Greek chorus is supplemented by casual passers-by, including the city pigeons and local goldfish.

(Talking animals are a regular element in the strip. Once Brenda was menaced by a horde of marabunta, which were talking about how delicious she looked. Another time she was served a dish of raw snails floating in champagne, and one of the snails was saying, "Hic! I'm crocked!")

Another distinctive element in the strip is the strong resemblance Brenda has to certain traditional female fantasy figures (such as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty). This dichotomy is that men "do" and women "be." The constant refrain, the emphasis that Messick places on Brenda as a "glamorous" figure (she is constantly referred to as "La Starr" and as "the most glamorous redhead in the world"), her fancy wardrobe (she recently acquired seven mink coats), the way the men in the strip take one look at Brenda and instantly realize that they have found the most beautiful, desirable woman in the world—all these items and more are constantly telling the reader that the most wonderful thing in this fantasy world is not to **do** as Brenda Starr **does**, but to **be** Brenda Starr. She is the wish-fulfillment personification of all the traditionally feminine desires. She is the princess of the fairy tale.

Naturally, as the acme of existence, Brenda need suffer no competition for her place in the sun, and Messick has thoughtfully not provided any. All of the other female characters are flawed in one way or another. Brenda's best friend, a woman reporter named Hank O'Hair, is so masculine in appearance that it was almost a year before I found out that she was a woman. Another redheaded woman who also has the name Brenda Starr and "who could pass for La Starr's younger sister," is crippled. Slipper Veil, as noted, was actually a man. Lucy LaTouche (a blonde with big, **big** eyes and curves to match) hod the manners and morals of a black widow spider. Galaxy Gal (who was Slippery St. John's fiancee for a while—when they broke up, though, he fell in love with his Aunt Brenda) was a demented comic book fan who, without her elaborate make-up and wig, was just plain Amy Jones. And Starr Twinkle St. John, Brenda's daughter, is the ugliest child to appear in comics outside of the "bigfoot" strips. All of this reinforces Brenda's position as a sort of symbol of traditional feminine potency, fairy tale style.

Yet—Messick is not writing a fairy tale. Brenda is, after all, a reporter. She was a career woman long before such a thing was socially acceptable. Messick puts just as much emphasis on Brenda's position as a "working girl" as she does on the "glamour girl" image. The result is a paradox. It is one of the many paradoxes in the strip. For instance, Brenda is constantly having glamorous romantic adventures. She has been wooed non-stop by kings, counts, mobsters, mayors, and mystery men.


©1981 Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate
OH, MY DARLING... YOU MUST UNDERSTAND WHY I JUST HAD TO POSTPONE COMING HOME TO YOU AND STARR TWINKLE!

Brenda leaves her "loved ones" waiting so she can buy fur coats.

She is currently being given the full treatment by Cash Wallstreet, a billionaire who dresses in satin dressing gowns and looks like a younger, more athletic version of Simon Stagg (from DC's **METAMORPHO** comic of the 1960s—initially drawn by Ramona Fradon, not so coincidentally). Before that, she was named as correspondent in the billion-dollar divorce initiated by Shiek Oily O-le-um's number one wife. But despite all this, Brenda remains a faithful wife and mother.

Another paradox is Brenda's attitude toward her family. She is constantly going on about her dear "loved ones," and has needed tranquilizer whenever Starr Twinkle gets kidnapped or Basil is presumed dead or insane. And yet, in one story, Basil is hypnotized by a mad psychiatrist to turn over Starr Twinkle to a mysterious third party, and then to disappear himself, so that for months Brenda is

MEANWHILE:
YES, BOSS...EVERYTHING HAS GONE AS PLANNED... EVEN BETTER THAN PLANNED! HE SHOULD BE HERE ANY MINUTE!
I HOPE!
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Slipper Veil, Basil's, um, nephew.

BRENDA GETS DRESSED FOR HER NEXT TRY AT CASH WALLSTREET.
AND VIA THE GRAPEVINE, CASH LIKES HIS WOMEN FLASHY — SO I'D BETTER MAKE THIS SLIT HIGHER.
10/30
OH, MS. BRENDA, WHERE YOU GOING DRESSED LIKE A SO-AND-SO?
GERTIE, PLEASE... I'M DRESSING FOR MY JOB.
NOW DON'T GO TELLING ME YOU'RE GONNA GO WORKIN' IN DUDS LIKE THEM.
BEING A TOP NEWSPAPER REPORTER, ONE MUST DRESS ANY WAY IT TAKES TO GET A STORY... BESIDES, BOSS'S ORDERS.
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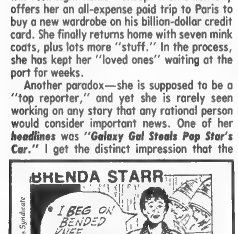
In the memory of her dead husband, Brenda dresses up like a so-and-so? This, claims Donna Ugol, is evidence of *BRENDA STARR*'s questionable moral presentation.

agonizing over where her "loved ones" are. Just as Basil recovers from the hypnotism and Starr Twinkle escapes on foot from the psychiatrist's sister (who wasn't really his sister, and at the time Starr Twinkle was kidnapped she was too young to walk or talk; the stories get pretty complicated), Brenda falls into the clutches of Shiek Oily O-le-um, an oil-rich shiek who dresses her in a belly dancer's outfit. Brenda is in his camp when she gets the news her husband and child are okay and eagerly awaiting her return. Naturally, Brenda will rush right home—except then Shiek Oily offers her an all-expense paid trip to Paris to buy a new wardrobe on his billion-dollar credit card. She finally returns home with seven mink coats, plus lots more "stuff." In the process, she has kept her "loved ones" waiting at the port for weeks.

Another paradox—she is supposed to be a "top reporter," and yet she is rarely seen working on any story that any rational person would consider important news. One of her ***headlines*** was "***Galaxy Gal Steals Pop Star's Car.***" I get the distinct impression that the


BRENDA STARR
I BEG ON BENDED KNEE... DON'T ASK ME TO CUT THE MOST BEAUTIFUL RED HAIR IN THE WORLD!
©1981 Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate

Another victim of Brenda's fatal charm.

FLASH is a ***NATIONAL ENQUIRER doppelganger***; however, it is constantly referred to as a "top" newspaper.

However, these paradoxes by and large add to the strip. They contribute to the "theatre of the absurd" feeling which Messick's writing produces. The blend of images is not smooth, but it is intriguing and even sometimes delightful.

I do have reservations about ***BRENDA STARR***, though. The fairy tale elements are largely all in fun, but upon seriously considering them, they can be disturbing. There is much in the traditional female role that is a source of anger and revulsion. If ***BRENDA STARR*** was not obviously too absurd to take seriously as a role model, I would have serious reservations about having young children exposed to it.

I also object to the strip occasionally on moral grounds. For example, when Brenda discovered that Slipper Veil was actually a male, Slippery and Basil begged her not to print the story. If it got out, Slippery would not only lose an important source of income, but would be in physical danger from the guys to whose chairs "Slipper" had tied slippers. Brenda had almost agreed not to print the story when she heard that the ***COMET*** was going to print it. She immediately batted out the copy ("No way I could let ***that rag scoop me!***"). I feel that a truly honorable person would not have so eagerly abandoned family feeling for the ego-boo of printing a scandalous story before someone else could.

There was another, more recent, incident, which occured shortly after Basil St. John was lost at sea (when the hot air balloon he was in went down in a storm in the Bermuda Triangle). To shake Brenda out of her depression at her husband's death, the owner of the ***FLASH***, Atwell Livright, assigned her the job of interviewing Cash Wallstreet. She dressed herself in a high-necked skirt suit and glasses, and hid her "beautiful red hair" under a hat. She did not get in to see Wallstreet, and the flunky she talked to said Wallstreet had just left by plane. Returning to the city room, she was told that that was the line that was given out whenever Wallstreet didn't like what he saw through the one-way mirrors of his outer office. Livright told Brenda that all she had to do to get the interview was to let her hair down, unbutton the top buttons of her blouse, and put a slit in her skirt, and Wallstreet would turn the plane around in mid-air—to which Brenda responded that in her dear husband's memory, she would get the story with her wits, not her body. The very next time she attempted the interview, she dressed in a slinky dress with a low front and a high slit, shoes with four-inch heels, and a feather boa—in honor of her dear husband's memory, no doubt.

Taken all in all, I feel that ***BRENDA STARR*** is a really nifty strip. It's probably not something that would appeal to everyone (in fact, the ***BRENDA STARR*** fans I know all have one thing in common—a whacked-out sense of humor), but it's unique in its weirdness—and it seems to be getting more and more, um, ***unique*** all the time.

BRENDA STARR
UNFORTUNATELY FOR LA STARR, BIG NEWS SCOOPS DON'T JUST POP UP WHEN YA NEED 'EM!
9-5
©1981 Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate
HOW ABOUT ALL OF US GETTING OUR HEADS TOGETHER AND CREATING ONE?
HEY! THAT'S A GREAT IDEA!

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STAN LEE
PLOT AND PENCILS BY
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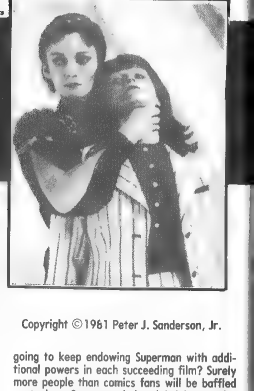
End NOTES



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Questions and more questions. They ran through my mind all through ***SUPERMAN II***. Certainly the film gave me enough time to think about them. The Phantom Zone escapees do not arrive on Earth until the film is halfway over, and they do not meet Superman until it is three-quarters over! So there is plenty of time for one to amuse himself checking his watch and puzzling over those irritating questions.

The three Kryptonian criminals from the Phantom Zone—General Zod, Ursa, and Non—present a pack of questions all by themselves. They knew nothing of Earth before their release, so how is it that they understand English? How can they talk in space or on the airless moon? Probably most of us accept the idea of being able to hear explosions in space in movies; silent explosions would not have the same dramatic effect. But when ***SUPERMAN II*** shows us astronauts garbed in pressurized spacesuits, how can we ignore the reason that they are wearing them? How can we ignore the fact that there is no air for sound to travel through? If the Phantom Zone trio are invulnerable, why does Ursa wince in pain when a snake bites her? Where did Zod get the ability to levitate objects? Was he not nearly invincible already? Why confuse people by giving him that power as well? The narrator of the ***SUPERMAN II*** trailers says that the three villains "have the same powers as Superman" as we see Zod levitate a man high into the air. I always felt an urge to shout "Superman can't do ***that***!" Well, who knows? Maybe he will in ***SUPERMAN III***, to the bewilderment of forty-plus years of his past and present fans. And what happens to the Phantom Zoners at the film's end? (I trust that by the time this review appears most of you will have seen the movie, and so I will not be giving anything away.) We last see them falling into snowy crevasses in Superman's arctic Fortress of Solitude. Were they buried alive? Did Superman get them out? Then what did he do with them?

Perhaps these are minor points, but they indicate a lack of care on the part of the filmmakers. Moreover, it surely cannot help the film to keep raising nagging questions in the viewers' minds. The audience for this film wants to suspend its disbelief, but doing so is difficult when the film is dotted with obvious gaps in logic.

There are still bigger gaps as well, right at the heart of the story. Superman is informed by a hologram-like recording made by his long-dead mother Lara that he must give up his powers in order to live with an Earthwoman. Why? The film gives neither him nor us any reason. Furthermore, Lara states that if Superman enters a "molecule chamber" filled with red solar radiation, his powers will be removed permanently and irrevocably. The chamber deprives Superman of his powers, and, oddly enough, changes his costume into Earth clothing, but somehow he regains both powers and costume in the course of the film. How? Again there is no explanation. This is inexcusable sloppiness. A story cannot establish a rule and then nonchalantly cast it aside. ***SUPERMAN II***'s screenwriters should not first tell us that Superman lost his powers forever and then contradict themselves without a good explanation. And when the Zoners lose their powers due to the red solar radiation, why don't ***their*** costumes change?

After Superman lost his powers, how did he and Lois return from the Arctic? When the Fortress was created, did it come complete with that car we see them driving? How does the powerless Superman get back to the Fortress? We just see him walking and trying to hitch a ride. But the Fortress is in the middle of a vast arctic wasteland! A person cannot just walk or drive a car to get there or back!

Why were the Zone villains, supposedly gifted with super-hearing, unable to hear what Superman whispered to Luthor? Why did Superman break off his battle with the Zoners in Metropolis? How did he know that Luthor would bring them to the Fortress? What is this red webbing Superman pulls off his chest insignia to ensnare Non? Why did Superman's parents apparently spend all that time constructing that green crystal that created a huge Fortress compiete with a "molecule chamber" and a library of educational hologram tapes instead of building something more useful: a spacecraft big enough for them to escape Krypton's explosion in? Then there's the biggest conundrum of all: how does Superman wipe out Lois' memory of his secret identity and most of the events of the film just by kissing her? (Think of the strange implications of that act as well: Kissing equals mind control over women?) Do you also have the sinking feeling that the ***SUPERMAN*** moviemakers are going to keep endowing Superman with additional powers in each succeeding film? Surely more people than comics fans will be baffled as to how Superman induced Lois' amnesia. Moreover, as with Zod's additional power, Superman's new psychic ability was entirely unnecessary. He could simply have used his established power of hypnotism to make her forget, or even used some crystalline gadget from the Fortress. At least the filmmakers did not have Superman try to solve the situation the way he resurrected Lois in the first movie, by turning back time to a point before the earthquake began, which meant that Superman would have to battle the quake all over again! There are so many presumably-highly-paid writers credited for working on this film, and these obvious logic flaws go right by them!

It should also be obvious that ideally a film of this sort that has such a powerful and charismatic hero should match him with a villain who is equally formidable in both might and screen presence, and who projects a sense of evil as strongly as the hero projects nobility. In short, the ***SUPERMAN*** films need equivalents of Darth Vader. In the comics Lex Luthor fills that role admirably, not just through the sinister creations of his scientific genius, but also through the intensity of his hatred for Superman. The Luthor of ***SUPERMAN II*** is allowed to construct a hologram projector and a device for tracking Kryptonians, but otherwise demonstrates no scientific skills. In neither this nor the previous movie did Luthor create weaponry with which to threaten Superman or the world. In the previous film he hijacked the missiles he used from a convoy by trickery and procured a Kryptonite meteorite by ordinary means; neither action required any particular amount of genius. In ***SUPERMAN II*** Luthor's repeated claims to be "the world's greatest criminal genius" have no effect other than getting an easy laugh. He has no grand,

complicated strategy in this film: he merely possesses information the Phantom Zone villains want and attempts dominion over Australia from them in return for revealing it. Anyone with that information could try to do the same, if the Zoners did not force the information out of him by threatening to kill him, and one wonders why they do not do so with Luthor. It is hard to believe that the film's Luthor would be successful even in negotiating with Earth-born crimelords. The man is a buffoon. He does not project authority. He does not project an aura of genius or even real cunning. He seems unconcerned about getting revenge on Superman. He does not project the lust to rule a nation that he claims to have. In this film he gives no hint of the inhuman cold-bloodedness any man who was willing to murder millions of people (as he tried to do in the previous film) must have. The movie Luthor is no more than a foppish, vain, fast-talking con artist—hardly in Superman's league. An acquaintance of mine has suggested that the movie Luthor resembles not the comics' Luthor but Funky Flashman from Jack Kirby's ***MISTER MIRACLE***.

JUST KEEP YOUR THOUGHTS ON SCOTT FREE!
OH, THAT'S GOOD, CHICKA! THAT'S GOOD! HOMEMADE DIALOGUE! BONNIE PLEASE "TALENT" GREAT, CHICKA! GREAT ACTIN'
BUT I CAN'T BE ANTONIO... PERHAPS I CAN AUDITION FOR ME AGAIN, SONNY! AS MEET YOUR NEW ACQUAINTANCE, "CLASS!"
YOU'RE AMAZING, MISTER WONDERFUL!
© 1981 DC Comics

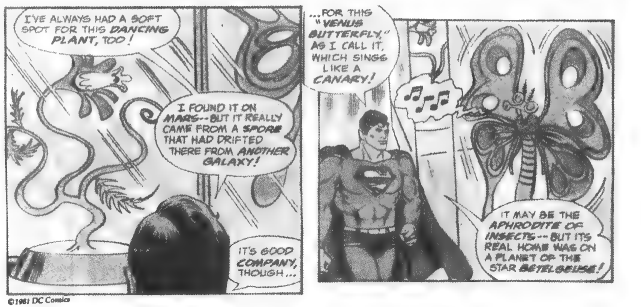
Was Jack Kirby's Funky Flashman the inspiration for *SUPERMAN II*'s Lex Luthor?

Yet appallingly, the New York film critics love the movie Luthor because he is such a buffoon. Although they are willing to treat genre films of the past such as westerns and detective films with respect, they draw back from giving themselves over to the fantasies in certain contemporary movie genres. With some critics the impression arises that such films are no good unless they can be viewed as being in part comedies. Hence ***EXCALIBUR*** (a film I, too, found flawed, but for different reasons) was condemned for being "too serious." Meanwhile Vincent Canby of ***THE NEW YORK TIMES*** praises ***SUPERMAN II*** for its "terrifically funny screenplay," admiringly quoting some of Luthor's dialogue as an example (6/22/81). We should be grateful that the films' version of Luthor is the only carryover from the camp treatment of the ***SUPERMAN*** material in the early versions of the previous movie's screenplay. But still, the movie Luthor is not one of ***SUPERMAN II***'s greatest virtues but one of its greatest flaws. If one cannot take his evil seriously, then how can one believe in the importance of the conflict between him and Superman? If the conflict is unbelievable, how can it generate any of the drama necessary to an action-adventure film? What good is a mythic figure of good in such a film without a mythic figure of evil?

ONE DAY, IN SUPERMAN'S ARCTIC FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE, AS HE TESTS AN AMAZING NEW INVENTION WHILE SUPERGIRL WATCHES...
CAN YOU HEAR ME, SUPERMAN?
YES, MON-EL! WONDERFUL! MY I CAN COMMUNICATE WITH PHANTOM ZONE PRISONERS
© 1981 DC Comics
THEN, THE DECISION
CONSIDERING YOUR ADVANCED AGE AND SINCERE REMORSE, WE'RE PAROLING YOU! THIS RAY WILL RELEASE YOU FROM THE ZONE!
FREE AT LAST! THANKS, SUPERMAN! I PROMISE TO BE A GOOD CITIZEN OF KANDOR!

The Phantom Zone as it "appeared" in *SUPERMAN* comics of the 1960s. It was described as a "weird twilight dimension" and housed all of Krypton's major criminals (including the comics version of General Zod—there is neither an Ursa nor a Non in the comics).

The Phantom Zone trio are better villains than Lutbor, certainly, but they too are inadequate. General Zod could have been ***SUPERMAN II***'s Darth Vader, but the character is instead presented as passive, seemingly indifferent or even bored. The film's Zod is perhaps meant to appear quietly but forcefully in control of every situation; instead, he seems to be something of a cipher. When the filmmakers have him mistake "Houston" for the name of the planet, or "God" for a mispronunciation of his own name, Zod looks foolish, as if the filmmakers wanted to bring him down towards their Luthor's level. They brought the mute Non even further down towards it. Non could potentially have been the most frightening of the Zoners: an embodiment of unthinking, barely controllable brute force. He could have been like a Kryptonian Hulk, if you will. But instead he is portrayed as another buffoon, popping his eyes and stupidly continually failing to ignite his heat vision properly. Ursa has the most forceful presence of the three and seems to take an active delight in her evil, but her role appears primarily to be


I'VE ALWAYS HAD A SOFT SPOT FOR THIS DANCING PLANT, TOO!
I FOUND IT ON MARS--BUT IT REALLY CAME FROM A SPORE THAT HAD DRIFTED THERE FROM ANOTHER GALAXY!
IT'S GOOD COMPANY, THOUGH...
...FOR THIS "VENUS BUTTERFLY," AS I CALL IT, WHICH SINGS LIKE A CANARY!
IT MAY BE THE APHRODITE OF INSECTS--BUT ITS REAL HOME WAS ON A PLANET OF THE STAR BETELGEUSE!
©1983 DC Comics

"SUPERMAN III['s] version of the Fortress seems much more impressive this time around. The comics' Fortress makes much more sense as a home and headquarters, but it has also taken on the look of the ultimate comic collector's storeroom, with its Batman memorabilia room and its Jimmy Olsen room and Interplanetary Zoo and so on..."

restricted to telling people to obey her leader General Zod.

The Zoners' actions should establish the extent of their evil, but here again the film does not succeed as well as it should. Yes, they kill the astronauts, but since the film shows us so little of the astronauts' personalities, it is difficult to care as much as we should about their deaths. Moreover, their deaths are nowhere near as chilling as those of the spacesuited victims in ***OUTLAND*** or ***2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY***. Taking over a small town is hardly a great test of the Phantom Zone villains' powers, and some of their actions in this sequence come across as comical: the small town Southern sheriff overfamiliar from trucker and ***"James Bond"*** films shows up yet again so we can chuckle at his discomfiture. Zod's world takeover consists merely of tearing apart this small town and then invading the White House. It hardly seems convincing. What of the other world powers? Would they surrender so easily? Would the United States surrender just because the President had been taken prisoner? Surely there should have been scenes of the Zoners taking on battalions, or even missiles. Eventually we see some very impressive fireworks in the battle between the Zone triumvirate and Superman, but again the seriousness of the conflict and the devastation it wreaks is undermined: the battle is interrupted so we can watch a series of sight gags resulting from the Zone villains using superbreath on the bystanders.

SUPERMAN II has important good points as well. The film's version of the Fortress seems much more impressive this time around. The comics' Fortress makes much more sense as a home and headquarters, but it has also taken on the look of the ultimate comics collector's storeroom, with its Batman memorabilia room and its Jimmy Olsen room and Interplanetary Zoo and so on. With its huge statues of Superman's parents and all the Kyrptonian memorabilia, the Fortress also seems uncomfortably like a retreat for a parent-obsessed child who never grew up. The movie Fortress transforms that implied parent-worship into something inspiring. This Fortress is like a temple of the gods—Jor-El, Lara, and the Kryptonian elders—who appear through the old "sacred" hologram—"visions" and to whom Superman comes for guidance, as if to a divine oracle. It is in this "temple" that Superman enacts important ritual actions: his education (in the first film), his surrendering and regaining of his powers, the defeat of his greatest foes (again through the stripping of powers), and even the consummation of a love relationship. The dramatic creation of this "temple" from the single crystal in this first film gains more power in retrospect. The creation of the Fortress was, after all, the way in which the young hero cast away at birth came on the verge of adulthood to learn his true identity and heritage, following the traditional pattern of myth. I prefer the green, paradisical Krypton of the comics to the ice-like, white, forbidding Krypton of the films, but the latter version does have a celestial look to it which the movie Fortress aptly mirrors. ***SUPERMAN II***'s opening sequence, recapping the imprisonment of Zod and company, underlines the notion of Krypton as the realm of the gods: their judges are presented as eerie, enormous disembodied heads. The crime of the trio (stealing a crystal) emphasizes the crystals' talismanic nature in the films. It is a green crystal that leads Superman to the site of the Fortress and creates it in the first film, and that same crystal is apparently the key to the restoration of his powers in the second. Crystals trigger the "oracular" holograms, and all of the Fortress and the surface of Krypton seem to be made of crystals. In being expelled from the "realm of the gods," imprisoned and then escaping to wreak havoc on Earth, Zod and company resemble Lucifer and the fallen angels.

The premise of ***SUPERMAN II*** is certainly brilliant: Superman gives up his powers for Lois but then finds Earth conquered by three evil Kryptonians. The best aspects of this movie are those involving the relationship between Superman and Lois. Lois is only portrayed as the complete jerk which one might have feared she would be in her first sequence, in which she holds onto the bottom of an elevator babbling about the Nobel Prize (journalists don't get Nobels, by the way: they get Pulitzers) as she ascends into the midst of terrorists armed with an H-bomb, not to mention more conventional weaponry. Getting killed is a far more likely prospect for her than getting an exclusive. The Niagara Falls sequence, in which she leaps into the rapids in order to force Clark to reveal himself to be Superman and rescue her,

could have made her look even more foolish, especially since Kent rescues her without giving his secret away. Certainly in a slide show preview of the film that I saw at a convention, the audience was falling over itself with laughter at her. But oddly enough, though the sequence is still amusing, in the film it is not hilarious. Lois' danger is too evident. Moreover, she is entirely serious when she jumps and grimly condemns her own seeming foolishness after her rescue. Nor do we see her nastily nagging Clark as she has in past stories; instead she is genuinely fond of Clark even before she learns his other identity.

It is wonderfully refreshing that once Lois does learn that Clark is Superman, he recognizes that he has no good reason to keep the secret from her and admits both it and his feelings for her. His surrender of his superpowers for her comes across as an affecting sacrifice in the name of love, so much so that one can ignore any unpleasant implications that could be read into the scene, such as the idea that love and sex are somehow weakening to the male. There is no indication as to how much time has passed for the characters between the two movies or how close they have become in that time. Apparently, though, Lois has come to know Superman/Clark well enough so that she sincerely cares for him as a person rather than simply being infatuated with his super-heroic image. So it is again refreshing to find that, as the scene in which the powerless Superman is badly beaten in a diner demonstrates, she cares as deeply for him without his powers as she did when he still had them. Lois' and Clark's final scene together in the movie, in which she tearfully confesses her anguish over the dilemmas in their relationship, is surprisingly serious and affecting. ***SUPERMAN II*** unexpectedly has its greatest success in making this strange romance movingly real. Unfortunately, the filmmakers have now written themselves into a corner. Having decided that a lovers' relationship between Lois and a Superman who must maintain a secret identity and be forever available to handle emergencies would not work, what can they do with the romance between the two in future movies?

SUPERMAN II is also superb in devising moments in which the hero triumphantly turns the tables on an adversary in a way certain to make the audience cheer. It is wonderful when Superman, again apparently powerless and kneeling before Zod, takes his hand to kiss it and instead seizes it in a nearly crushing grip, revealing in an instant that Zod is the one who actually lost his powers. It is fun to then see Lois turn on her captor Ursa and knock her out in one punch, and even more happily rewarding to see Clark return to the diner and show his former tormentor who is now the stronger (and without seriously hurting him, either). However, since the film makes such a point of the fact that people think Superman is a coward for taking so long to confront the Phantom Zone villains and then seemingly fleeing from them, it would have been nice if Superman could somehow have defeated them in public

"[Lois] is genuinely fond of Clark."

view, or at least if Superman could have been shown delivering his now powerless enemies to the President along with the White House flag he does bring in the film.

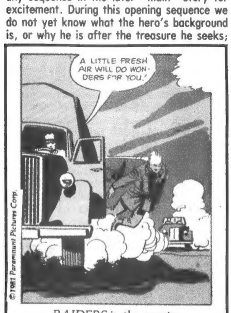
The principal problem with ***SUPERMAN II*** is that it is as slow as the proverbial molasses. Most of the movie drags on, crosscutting among Luthor, the Phantom Zone villains, and Superman and Lois, rarely allowing any scene to build to an effective climax, and undermining the momentum of all of them by the continual shifting back and forth. Whereas in the trailers the battle between Superman and the Zone criminals over Metropolis is fast-paced and explosive, in the movie it seems slow and ponderous. The battle scene contains too many extraneous shots of the watching crowd, who are too stupid to get out of the way, and who even at one point attack Zod and company when it is obvious that ordinary humans would have no chance against them. Those shots only slow the sequence down. There is too much space between the spectacular effects in this fight, and too few of them. One would expect to see entire buildings get leveled; even a ***"Godzilla"*** film would fulfill that requirement. The battle could have raged in different locations over the world, or at least when the Zone criminals trailed Superman to the Arctic, we could have been shown a fight in which they hurled glaciers about. Instead there is a sequence in which Superman and Non battle underneath a Metropolis street in which all we see is the street shaking. It reminds me of Bob Clampett's Cecil the Seasick Sea Serpent doing battle with the Phantom of the Horse Opera while both are invisible. "This is the greatest fight scene ever filmed, folks," comments Cecil; "It's too bad you can't see it."

Unfortunately for ***SUPERMAN II***, it will in-

"It is wonderfully refreshing that once Lois does learn that Clark is Superman, he recognizes that he has no good reason to keep the secret from her..."
©1981 DC Comics

©1981 Paramount Pictures Corp. Harrison Ford gambles all in *RAIDERS*.

evitably be contrasted with the far superior adventure film that opened in the United States only the week before: George Lucas' and Steven Spielberg's ***RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK***. ***RAIDERS***' excellence points up most of ***SUPERMAN II***'s mistakes. ***RAIDERS***' villains are truly sinister; its humor never undermines the basic seriousness of the storyline. There are no dead spots whatsoever. The film is constantly on the move, with each sequence building to a powerful climax and then giving way to the next. Even the quiet moments between action sequences serve to further the story. Whereas ***SUPERMAN II*** begins by slowly recapping scenes from the previous movie, and only slowly moves into the first action sequence, ***RAIDERS*** throws its audience right into the middle of an adventure, one that equals any sequence in the later—main—story for excitement. During this opening sequence we do not yet know what the hero's background is, or why he is after the treasure he seeks;



RAIDERS in the comics.

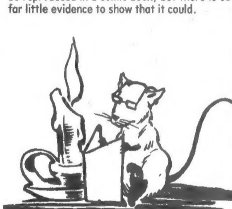
indeed, for half of the sequence we do not know what he is after or even what his name is. But for the time being we know enough—he is on a quest in which he is menaced by death at every turn—and we are caught up in the nonstop rush of events as the hero, Indiana Jones, evades one incredible danger after another.

RAIDERS is full of lessons not only for people who do action-adventure material in movies but for those who do it in comics as well. Take ***RAIDERS'*** economy of means in its screenplay: a single bit of story business will fulfill two functions at once. A lesser script would probably establish Jones' uneasiness about snakes by simply having him mention it in the dialogue. ***RAIDERS*** does it instead by having him find a pet boa constrictor in the seat of the plane he uses to escape in the opening sequence. The snake business here simultaneously provides a moment of comic relief to relax the audience after the breathless high tension of the previous ten minutes, and prepares the audience for Jones' reactions when he is confronted with a whole chamber filled with snakes later on in the film, and without making the audience feel it is suffering through creaky exposition. Or take the drinking contest that opens the sequence in the bar owned by Marion, the heroine. It establishes a side of Marion's character as well as the atmosphere of the bar itself, and it also sets up the later sequence in which Marion tries to escape a villain by getting him drunk.

RAIDERS also shows the degree of success writers can have if they go beyond merely fulfilling the audience's expectations and instead put in as many suspenseful situations as they can fit into their stories. An ordinary script would only put a few traps into the sequence in the Peru temple; ***RAIDERS*** provides a long series of them. In a more ordinary script, when Jones has to commandeer a truck, he would probably have just one fight with the driver, knock one car off the road, and take off in the truck. ***RAIDERS*** has him race after the truck on horseback, force several cars off the road, battle the driver twice, get pushed through the windshield and shot, and, incredibly, climb along the bottom of the moving truck in order to get in position for the second fight. The more twists and turns in each sequence, and the more spectacular they are, the more exciting and absorbing the story becomes, and the further it distances itself from run-of-the-mill stories of the same genre.

Marvel Comics' adaptation of ***RAIDERS*** captures the complexity of the story, but it is otherwise deeply inadequate. The faces look sketchy and are not capable of showing subtleties of emotion. There is little sense of mood in the art. There is no sense of the exotic in the Egyptian scenes, or of the ethereal and horrifying in the scene in which the Ark of the Covenant is finally opened, or of the beauty of the natural surroundings in the film. Compare the last panel in the first 32-page comic in Marvel's ***RAIDERS*** mini-series with the equivalent shot in the film itself. The film shows Marion and the villain in extreme close-ups against a pitch black background with the glowing hot torture instruments looming before her horrified face: it is a chilling shot. The comics panel presents the same scene in a very conventional way. Indeed, the whole comics adaptation always visualizes the story the same way that the movie does. But the comics version should have been done with the same kind of imaginativeness that went into conceiving what the film would look like. It would have been wonderful, in fact, if the ***RAIDERS*** comic had been done so well that it visualized some of the scenes better than the film did. That should be the ideal goal of a comics adaptation of movie material.

The comics ***RAIDERS***' biggest problem is the same as ***SUPERMAN II***'s: pacing. Whereas the ***RAIDERS*** movie moves so rapidly, the ***RAIDERS*** comic moves at a slow and (here it is again) utterly conventional pace, using none of the "cinematic" tricks, such as those involving size and number of panels, for speeding up the momentum of the story. Apart from the Goodwin/Simonson ***ALIEN*** I cannot think of a successful comics adaptation of an adventure film. It is dispiriting. One would like to think that the excitement of a good adventure film could be reproduced in a comic book, but there is so far little evidence to show that it could.



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